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THE

Honor of a Heart

FROM THE GERMAN OF VACANO,

By Mary J. Safford.

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THE HONOR OF A HEART.

THE HONOR OF A HEART

A Novel.

BY

Emil Mario VACANO.

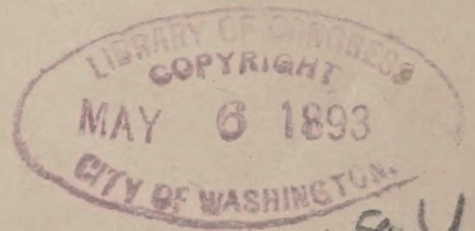
TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

By MARY J. SAFFORD.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY F. A. CARTER.

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THE HONOR OF A HEART.

CHAPTER I.

IN the most squalid quarter of a large capital, among old, narrow, dilapidated houses, stands a dwelling, still more ancient, narrow, and ruinous than any of its neighbors. The lower story is occupied by a shop where second-hand goods are sold, which smell as if a crop of mushrooms were growing in the dark corners. At the back an old man notes in a dirty, dog's-eared book the articles he has bought and sold. He deals in old clothes, paper, bones, rags, pictures, ladies' bonnets, and sometimes articles which suspicious-looking individuals, entering the back shop—where a faint ray of light strug-

gles through the dust-covered window—draw from their fathomless pockets, keeping meantime their red, bleared eyes intently fixed upon the door. On such occasions gold often glitters and disappears in Herr Ilde's desk like a flash of lightning. Herr Ilde has never yet appeared before the courts as a receiver of stolen goods; hitherto he has been fortunate. The old house is known as a lucky one. All its inmates are suspicious characters, thieves and adventurers; yet no one has ever been arrested within its walls. This fact is well-known to all vagabonds, and the wretched rooms in the miserable dwelling never stand empty. Rogues are as superstitious as lovers.

At the present time the damp, dirty apartments have the following occupants: The first story is rented to Herr Temper, who wears handsome black whiskers, a paste breast-pin, and a large, dirty shirt-collar. He asserts that he is on intimate terms with all the nobles in the country, and the statement is believed, for he is never absent from the races, and always returns with a number of pocket-handkerchiefs. Moreover, he is fond of gambling until almost dawn in the back rooms of second-class coffee-houses, where rich farmers lose their money like lords.

Part of the second story is occupied by a poor woman, a soldier's widow, who, since her husband's

death, has given herself up to drink, and now hangs about the inns and rents lodgings to discharged privates; the remaining portion by a man who introduced himself to Herr Ilde under the name of Moor. No one has ever seen his face, not even Herr Ilde, who only met him one November evening in the dim light of his back shop, on which occasion Herr Moor was muffled to the nose in a red woolen comforter.

In the third story three lodgers live in three adjoining rooms; first a rope-dancer at the "Orpheus," who merely performs his feats on the trapeze to be able to claim a profession in his dealings with the law. He is effeminate, very affected, and *rouges*, but extremely handsome, and scarcely beyond childhood. Then comes a Frenchman, Monsieur Jacques, an ex-lackey, who has a sharp, brown, wicked face, and the remnants of polished manners. He still wears a livery, and says he is trying to get another place, but meantime lives by no means uncomfortably on unknown resources. Next door to him dwells a factory girl, who rarely comes home, often only once a week, and sometimes not for several months. She is fair, slight, and always wears an old black veil on her bonnet. A very quiet lodger, who really lives at the factory where she works, and only comes here on her few holidays with her brother—a shabbily dressed young man—

that they may talk undisturbed. Such a lodging is rather an unusual luxury for a factory girl, but Herr Ilde says Fraulein Lina is a "sly one," and the brother undoubtedly a lover, whom the owner of the factory will not countenance; for the old man once saw the young girl, as a protection against the insufferable odor of vegetables which always fills the narrow staircase, draw from her pocket and press to her old black veil a handkerchief which must have cost at least four florins.

Fraulein Lina never remained all night, and on that account was Herr Ilde's favorite lodger, for he had a key to all the rooms in his house, and an intoxicated or hard pressed friend had often found shelter in the young girl's empty room, without the slightest fear that the intruder would be discovered by her unexpected return.

The whole narrow, dirty street was full of dingy, cellar-like shops, in which torn clothes and boots, waste-paper and broken glass, moulded and rotted, and was thronged by loathsome, greedy-looking men, going to and from their "work" in the neighboring alleys.

An old woman with a bundle of dirty clothes on her shoulders stood still in the midst of the crowd, looking steadily up at one of the windows in Herr Ilde's house.

A man who dealt in worn-out hats paused beside

her, and followed the direction of her glance. Soon ten persons assembled, and then a crowd, that began to chatter and talk.

“What’s the matter?” asked Herr Ilde, coming out of his shop with his spectacles on his nose, holding his dirty dressing-gown together. “Why are you all gaping at my house?”

A dozen harsh voices instantly replied, but he could make nothing of the answer and was obliged to enter the crowd and stare up himself. There he saw dangling from one of the third-story windows of his own house an object which somewhat resembled a doll. Herr Ilde, as one of the old clothes dealers asserted, turned green with indignation; it was a man, who had put a noose round his neck and then let himself slide over the sill!



CHAPTER II.

Castle Kopa, near the capital, was a huge conglomeration of rococo wings and modern architecture. The ancient edifice had been built for centuries, and was not yet completed, though it resembled a little city rather than the residence of a mere nobleman. The Counts von Kopa had always been extremely hospitable, and considered it their duty to constantly add new suites of rooms to the older apartments, as if to blind themselves to the increasing loneliness of their home, for during the last few years the Kopa family had become startlingly small. For two or three generations the principal line had suffered from some hereditary disease, which never permitted them to enjoy sound health, and the younger brothers usually died in foreign countries or were killed in some duel. It was a peculiarity of the race that the younger sons were always what the French term "*mauvais sujets*."

The huge park that surrounded the castle was also a conglomeration of various tastes and periods.

One portion, laid out in true English style, where the rambler sank in the tall grass as if it were deep water, and the ivy twined luxuriantly around the trunks of gigantic trees, adjoined a dainty triangular garden, with closely-clipped shrubs and crumbling stone statues, which represented dwarfs in court costume, or goddesses with floating draperies.

When spring approached, the rooms in the newest wing were always aired, the oil paintings, which had been rolled together and placed in a corner, put back in their frames, the chandeliers released from their dusty gauze covers, and during the March days, when the wind roared and the snow whirled outside, a bright fire was kept in the chimney-pieces, though no one occupied the apartments.

It always makes a singular impression upon the mind to see comfortably furnished rooms, whose windows look out upon a feudal park, and whose hearths glow with bright fires, which cast a vivid light on the dark oil paintings, and yet where nothing lives, breathes, smiles, or moves.

On such days the wind always dies away toward evening, and handsome young Heinrich, the *valet*, who spent the winter at the castle with the old steward, said to his companion: "How happy people might be here ; it is incomprehensible why the family don't live at Castle Kopa instead of always going away."

But "the family" never came until after the first flowers had bloomed, and it was so this year.

Warm fires and the spring breezes had brightened, purified, and made fragrant all the apartments in the inhabited wing when the owner arrived, Count Leuthold Kopa, the head of the family, with his dignity, gray hair, and affable smile. With him came his younger brother, Captain Count Oswald Kopa. This brother had had a different mother, and was by no means rich. It was said that Count Leuthold's father, Count Raimond, was utterly ruined when he married the deformed old Fraulein von Marrbach. Leuthold was the son of this moneyed match, which added a magnificent new wing to the castle. On his mother's death, the whole colossal fortune was bequeathed to her only son. The old count now married a second time: his early love, the poor Countess Albina Heeringen, and the son of this marriage, Count Oswald, inherited only his father's greatly diminished property. Thus it happened that the social positions of the two brothers were as diverse as their ages. Count Oswald was a handsome, brown-haired young man of eight-and-twenty; he had formerly been captain in a regiment of cavalry, and then spent some time in Paris—it was said on terms of mortal enmity with his step-brother, and in the most abject poverty, as he had long since squandered his small property.

Now, however, they were reconciled, and the careless ex-soldier yawned away his life in the family castle.

There was also an orphaned relative belonging to the party, a little girl of seven, Countess Flora Kopa-Rinkhausen, with her young governess, Fraulein Jennie Lorm, who was teacher and turtle-dove in one. A second orphaned relative, Countess Marie Rinkhausen, was expected in a few days from Heimthal, where her mother had just died.

Two large carriages had brought the family, and a third conveyed the servants.

The steward, clad in a dress coat, had received them at the portico, and the young *valet*, Heinrich, peeped from behind the folding-doors, to catch a glimpse of the new maid, who must surely come with them, for the little countess and her governess employed the same servant.

It was a lovely evening in early summer when the carriages stopped in the soft sand. A warm, broad, crimson stream of sunlight fell obliquely across the avenue, between two marble goddesses and two of the columns of the portico. A little brown-haired girl first sprang from the carriage into the arms of a servant, who had jumped from the box. Then a handsome young man appeared, and with a few careless words turned to offer his hand to a little fair woman, about five-and-twenty,

attired in a gray travelling dress, with a gray gauze veil twisted around her head ; and, lastly, Count Leuthold himself, a stout, gray-haired man of fifty, was received in the arms of half-a-dozen people as if in a cloud. He liked to drive in a carriage with others, to be entertained, and always alighted last, that he might not lose his dignity by undue haste.

These four persons with the steward and servants lingered a moment in the broad, red light of the setting sun, talking together.

Three men-servants and a black-haired, keen-eyed French maid alighted from the second carriage, and also pressed forward into the sunlight. The steward uttered his annual flowery speech of welcome, and the whole party ascended the steps, vanishing like glowing iron suddenly dipped in water as they left the strip of sunshine.

The carriages drove around the castle to the stables ; the keeper of the park gates, who had also come up to make his bow to his master, returned to his cottage, and nothing remained on the terrace except a flock of birds, which once more ventured down to the ground from the nearest trees, and the rosy sunlight.

When this disappeared, the whole castle seemed frozen. A gray, cold sky appeared to recede from the earth, and the leaves rustled faintly.

A child's face was visible at one of the windows,



"IT IS YOUR TURN," SHE SAID COLDLY.—See Page 57.

gazing eagerly into the garden, and a pair of little hands vainly tried to raise the sash.

At the same moment the window directly underneath opened and the handsome ex-captain appeared at it to survey the landscape. He heard the noise above him and looked up.

“ I can’t open it, Fraulein Jenny,” said the child.

The small white hand of the pretty, fairy-like governess opened the window, and her fair face smiled beside the child’s.

“ There is Uncle Oswald !” cried the little girl.

“ Ah ! you want to become familiar with the scene you will see daily and hourly for the next few weeks ? It is not well to make its acquaintance to-night, count—it will give the landscape a tinge of gloom,” said the governess, laughing.

“ You are right,” replied Count Oswald, with a reflection of the mournfulness of the twilight on his face, and drew back into his room.



CHAPTER III.

Count Leuthold Kopa had lived for years under the shadow of his name, untouched by the world and the rough cliffs and edges, which this bottom of the sea of heaven usually offers mortals. Count Leuthold lived in his sumptuous apartments, his parks, his carriages, his boxes at the theatres, and the private rooms at clubs, with the pedestal of his ancient ancestry under his feet. He led a life surrounded as by a velvet mantle, with centuries of grandeur, and sheltered from every rude breeze that blows over our imperfect earth. He possessed great wealth, a noble name, high honors, and splendid expectations.

Count Leuthold was by no means a proud man. On the contrary, he was kind-hearted, amiable, and fond of pleasure. He was an aristocrat in the best sense of the word, like all the Kopas before him. Perhaps he would not have shrunk from embracing a brave vagabond who had saved a peasant's child from the flames; but the thought

that he should ever be compelled to rise, without finding a servant ready to wait on him, would have been his death. *Il en serait tombe raide mort.*

Count Leuthold was about fifty years old. In his youth he had been forced to marry, but his wife had died young, leaving no children, and since that time the count had remained a widower. A cheerful widower, who, wrapped in the velvet cloak of his rank, moved lightly over the rough edges of our imperfect world.

A faint shadow had perhaps been cast upon his life—but not deep enough to reach his heart—by the frivolity of his younger brother, with whom he had lived for two years in that mute, total estrangement which every officer who has allowed vast debts to be paid by the head of his family has experienced. For some time, however, my lord had been reconciled to his brother, though not until the latter, *faute d'argent*, had been compelled to lead a vagabond life a whole year in Paris. And this was the manner in which it had come about.

The fairy-like blonde governess of the little Countess Flora Kopa-Rinkhausen, Count Leuthold, and the orphan herself were sitting together one evening beside the comfortable English-looking hearth of the tea-room, in the winter palace. The little girl, while turning the leaves of a picture-book, suddenly asked, "Uncle Leuthold, tell me

who is the handsome officer hanging there?" and she pointed to a portrait on the wall, winking slyly at Fraulein Jenny, as if to make her notice how crafty she was.

Count Leuthold became a shade less cheerful, coughed, frowned, and said, "Nonsense!" This was due to the honor of the family. But Flora would not let the matter drop, teased for an answer, and at last, in her artless, childish fashion, drew her young governess, Fraulein Jenny, into the conversation, which became a lengthy one, for Count Leuthold seemed glad to have an opportunity, without any abatement of his dignity, to speak of his brother who was wandering about somewhere in France, because he was deserted, on account of his frivolity.

Fraulein Jenny had opened her greenish gray eyes very wide, and in her pretty, curious, girlish way, asked: "And isn't that a very illogical example, Herr Count?"

"Illogical!" cried Count Leuthold, in unutterable amazement, looking around him as if to consult his ancestors, who were hanging far away from him in Castle Kopa. Count Leuthold always acted according to the traditions of his race, and in good families it is a tradition to abandon worthless members. This custom had lasted for centuries. And now a dainty little plebian girl ventured to say that a

custom which had lasted for centuries was illogical ! Count Leuthold was utterly amazed.

“Certainly,” continued Fraulein Jenny, as she poured out a second cup of tea for the count, in doing which her slender white hand trembled under the weight of the silver tea urn. “If a relative is frivolous, to abandon him is a poor way to make him more sedate ; is he not, under such circumstances, almost forced to fall ? I think those are the very relatives who ought not to be permitted to go out of our sight—for their own sake, for the sake of the family, they ought to be fed to death rather than left to starve—on account of consistency.”

Count Leuthold gazed intently at the fire. He would have been a very intellectual man had he lived less luxuriously, borne a name which had not been distinguished for centuries. “Yes,” said he, “that may be true, but it is not customary, Fraulein.”

Fraulein Jenny laughed merrily. “Oh ! railroads were not customary either, when they were first used. But would you continue to travel in post-chaises, Herr Count ?”

Count Leuthold started as if he felt a sudden twinge of the gout, then joined in the laugh, and the whole conversation ended in a jest. But in the course of a few weeks this jest brought the ex-soldier to London, and Count Leuthold and his brother

were friends again. The former said, "This is our little cousin, Flora, who has lost both her parents. You never saw them, as you were always stationed in some garrison. And Marie Rinkhausen has become an orphan, too, so I have told her she should make one of the family. My home will be almost gay, Oswald," and he smiled kindly at his brother. "This is Fraulein Jenny Lorm," he added, and Count Oswald bowed.

Count Oswald, as has already been mentioned, was an extremely handsome young man, with that indescribable air of high breeding which seems to take it for granted that everything is at its service. He had a way of ordering a servant to sit in a carriage which reminded one of the condescension of a sovereign. It was the lordly manner which originates partly in the innate impulses of birth, partly from a French education. His face always wore the bright, open expression which springs not from happiness but carelessness. His elder brother, Count Leuthold, possessed more of the condescending cordiality of the English nobility, while Count Oswald had the easy grace of the French aristocracy. He was, however, even more unapproachable than his elder brother, unapproachable in his indifference. Women who loved the handsome officer must always have felt their hearts quail with

despair at the thought: "How can this careless, indifferent, negligent man feel anything?"

On the evening the family arrived, he walked through the corridor to the little octagonal dining-room, humming a song, and asked one of the servants, in a high-pitched, somewhat hoarse voice: "Are they all there?" to which the man—a good-looking lad, with shining brown hair—answered in the affirmative, and drew back against the wall. Count Oswald stopped singing as he crossed the threshold. The windows were covered with heavy green curtains, a lamp hung over the round table. Count Leuthold was just having a discussion with little Flora as to whether Puss in Boots had ever been transformed into a man or not, and Fraulein Jenny's transparent, fairy-like hands were fluttering among the cups and saucers on the waiter.

"'Puss in Boots' never was a man, and never became one," said Count Oswald, lazily approaching the table.

"I haven't sweetened it yet," observed Fraulein Jenny, as she placed his cup before the arm-chair he had pushed up to the table. Servants were never admitted at tea.

Count Leuthold rose, and, holding little Flora's fingers in his fat, white hand, approached the table, on which the hanging lamp was casting its cheerful, brilliant light.

"The park looks so large when we first return here," said Fraulein Jenny, tapping her rococo cup lightly with her spoon. "From our window it seems like a wilderness. And when one considers that each one of these huge trees is a house, and each branch a story, which has its lodgers like the dwellings in the capital. Every blade of grass even has its poor people, parasites, laborers and thieves."

Fraulein Jenny Lorm always had the fanciful ideas natural to a childish nature. She spoke three languages and a half, played on the piano very correctly, sang, and had a good knowledge of geography. This was the serious side of her life, and, as a governess, she had a right to get rid of it as speedily as possible.

In other respects she was a perfect child, even to her smiles, which always appeared when one least expected them; a silly, bewitching, lovable little thing—a creature any moderately strong man could crush between two fingers. Her figure was perhaps too slight even for a fairy; her limbs seemed as if carved from ivory; her complexion was that of a lily; her hair had the hue of the ripest flax. Her features were so delicate and aristocratic that they could not help being beautiful. Her mouth was extremely mobile, and her eyes always had a surprised, startled expression. She involuntarily made every one think of a fresh, dewy flower.

Her dress was of modest gray silk, and her hair smoothly brushed. Her snowy collar and cuffs were faultless.

"Only that the inhabitants of the park are far more stupid than those of a city," said Count Oswald, lazily. "I've never yet been entertained in a park."

There are really owners of pleasure grounds who make this statement. And there are really poor people who long for parks.

"Because you have no love for nature!" said Count Leuthold, passing his fat hand over the stiffly starched ruffles of Flora's dress, as she leaned over the back of his chair, twisting her doll's curls.

"Like almost every man," said Fraulein Jenny, *naively*, pushing a plate of bread a little nearer to Count Leuthold. "Only women admire nature for its own sake."

Count Oswald laughed. "They are unhappy, are they not?"

"Unhappy? I don't know. I have never been acquainted with any unhappy women. True, the teacher in our orphan school was always sad," said Fraulein Jenny, opening her eyes very wide.

Count Leuthold broke off a piece of bread. "Fraulein Jenny is right," said he. "Nature really exists only for women. Men merely take it as a substitute for society. There is our cousin, Count-

ess Marie, who will arrive at the castle to-morrow or the day after. Her last letter, in which the poor child thanks me for the shelter I have offered her, is full of sorrowful farewells to the fields around her mother's house, and enthusiastic praises of our 'Paradise' here, which is to afford her consolation."

Fraulein Jenny's face assumed a compassionate expression, while the ex-officer made a grimace. "Declamations of Solitary," he said in his skeptical French manner, "which were intended to interest the new guardian."

Count Leuthold cast a rapid glance at Fraulein Jenny Lorm, and then turning to his brother said, carelessly: "*De grâce—songe qu'elle est notre parente.*"

"*Mais qui donc la voudrait blamer ? C'est sa pose à elle voilà tout,*" said Count Oswald, as he pushed his chair back, crossed his legs, and stroked the beard he wore *à la Napoleon III*. "If she were not a relative she would scarcely have a reason for joining our 'happy family.' You see, I remember. For my part I have always had a prejudice against people whose gratitude was as certain as death. One doesn't know how to take them."

Fraulein Jenny suddenly burst into a merry, ringing laugh. "If you place all dependent relatives in this category, Herr Count," she said, rising from the table, "you are mistaken. Countess Flora is

not even grateful enough to find your society amusing. Look there."

Little Flora, holding her doll rolled into a ball, had really fallen asleep, leaning on the back of Count Leuthold's chair, and her light floating curls mingled with the dead lustreless hair of the toy. "Our tea has been somewhat delayed, and it is long past Flora's hour for retiring. Be kind enough to put her to bed, Fraulein, and try to have pleasant dreams on this, the first evening of our return."

Fraulein Jenny waked her pupil with a kiss, and, clasping child and doll in her arms, said a *bonne nuit*, and disappeared, while the lamp-light suddenly seemed to grow dim.

After her departure Count Oswald put one foot in another chair, and poured out half a glass of rum.

"A dear, priceless creature," said Count Leuthold, brushing the crumbs from his shirt. "A perfect treasure, after that French dragon, whom the poor child hated and feared."

"Indeed!" said Count Oswald. "I have always been indifferent to governesses, as you know. To me the whole race seems just alike—at the utmost the difference only consists in the greater or less degree of hypocrisy they use toward their employers." And he drank his rum and rose.

Count Leuthold remained seated, and courteously

raised his hand. "Going already," said he. "Can't you give me a moment, Oswald?"

"Oh! as many as you like," replied Oswald, as he passed his hand through his hair, leaned on the back of his arm-chair, and gazed at his brother with his beautiful sleepy eyes. Perhaps he might have felt somewhat surprised, but he only looked careless and sleepy.

Count Leuthold settled himself in a comfortable position, pushed aside some of the articles on the tea-table, and then scrutinized the tips of his fingers.

"I merely wished to employ the first evening of our new life here to say a few words about some points in our character, which are somewhat unlike, but with a little friendly feeling may easily be harmonized. I have desired this opportunity ever since, after years of variance, we became reconciled to each other at Bath three months ago, but could never find the right opportunity. Life at watering-places and in cities does not bring people in such close contact as here in the castle."

Count Oswald nodded, while a slight shade of sarcasm flitted like a flash of lightning over his keen, handsome face. "*Very* true," said he; "a remarkably wise observation, brother."

Count Leuthold, fixing his eyes steadily on the young man's face, continued: "You know, Oswald,

that heretofore our characters have been very unlike—perhaps because I am nearly twenty-five years older than you—in consequence of which we have never really learned to know each other. My temperament is thoroughly German. I am perfectly explicit; my views are plain. I have perhaps an undue respect for old customs, lead the same life our ancestors led before me, and think it has been a blameless one. You, on the contrary—”

Count Oswald made a hasty gesture, but his older brother's hand was again raised. “You on the contrary,” he continued, “are a younger son—”

“Yes, and after being reared like a prince, was thrust, with a miserable pittance, into the army, and when I continued my royal style of living, and incurred debts, you, who meantime had become a rich man and the head of the family, cast me off. *Voilà tout.*”

“Oh! no, no!” replied Count Leuthold, with a courteous smile. “Not at all. And even in money matters there would not have been so much occasion to blame your really chivalric conduct, as in observing your mode of life.”

Count Oswald's eyes still retained the same sleepy expression, but his face had grown a shade darker. “My mode of existence hitherto consisted in taking life as I found it, and enjoying what there was to enjoy. I have very little sentiment, and believe I

have never loved or been loved—really and sincerely, that is, except by silly girls.”

“Yes, and in your brilliant uniform you have visited places, played games, had adventures, and performed various eccentric acts, which, though in and of themselves very charming and delightful, did not quite harmonize with the views of your family.”

“Especially as they cost money!” cried Oswald, with a loud laugh. “The whole point consists in the fact that you are a Croesus and I a beggar. Isn’t it so?”

“Oh, oh! We, therefore, found—”

“We?”

“Yes, we—and unfortunately I, as the head of the family, was the principal personage in the affair—after having repeatedly paid your debts to an amount far beyond your modest inheritance, we found ourselves compelled—”

“To abandon me.”

“With heavy hearts. You then went to France.”

“I went to France and there lived—without money. I wanted to earn some, and thus a frivolous young German officer became a frivolous French student in the Quartier Latin. I was still tolerably comfortable—except for the circumstance of being utterly miserable. For I saw no escape. I was born a nobleman, and could not cringe before

plebeians. I beheld no future, and had no present. Sooner or later the end must come in the shape of a bullet. Just at that time the noble idea of becoming reconciled to me occurred to your mind, Leuthold."

Count Oswald paused, and again a smile flitted over his keen, intellectual face.

His brother bent his head, and there was real dignity, which, like all true dignity, had no tinge of condescension, in his face, as he said: "Yes. The thought occurred to me that our race was rapidly nearing an end. All the side branches have died out. The only remaining descendants are two girls, whom, at the most, I can only wed to men of rank. If I should die you would be the last heir of the name, so it is better for us to live together, try to become friends. I should like, in case you ever continue the family name, to have this good old castle kept up in the good old style."

Count Oswald drew himself up proudly; he never looked so handsome as when in anger. His face flushed with indignation, his eyes flashed with an imperious light, and his voice had a strange tone as he said: "Ah! all this is very true, *et tout ca c'est d'une justeese exquise*. But I should really like to hear from your infallible mouth, my dear brother, the acknowledged first gentleman of the universe, in what sense a gay life is incompatible with a

noble name. I have always had an impetuous spirit, a Bohemian nature, if you will—I have drank heavily, fallen in love, and incurred debts—unpardonable things, if you choose. But look around you! What heir of a noble family, not gifted by nature with the prerogative of dignity, was ever in his youth anything but the first of vagabonds? Remember Eriom Rosteani, Raimond Pasoco, Olivier Assen, and a dozen other counts and princes—they were all *mauvais sujets au dernier degre*; do they now support the honor of their names more than others?" Count Oswald had hurled the words at his brother in a sharp, quick, angry manner. Now he passed his hand over his brow and pretended to yawn, but his eyes remained steadily fixed upon Count Luthold, who no longer played with the tea-cups and examined his finger-nails. His old face, as he looked up quietly, reminded one of an oil painting, and his voice sounded like music as he said, "Frivolity, Oswald, is never an antipode of nobility—neither frivolity nor *vulgarity*, repulsive as the latter sounds; but the *blending* of frivolity with nobility is a stain on every name in the end. There are noblemen who spend the days of their youth in coffee-houses and the slums of the streets, but whose lives in the palaces of their ancestors are widely different. In the one case they are Bohemians, in the other, wearied supporters of their noble names. But there

is a frivolity, a recklessness which not only seeks its pleasure in all the pursuits you have named, but also in *contempt for rank*, and this has hitherto been the fact with you. A true nobleman may have every vice, but never at the time when he has his duty to fulfill, his name to uphold, his part to play. Common men, Oswald, seek an object, a goal in life; they inquire whether there is a God, and the search makes them happy or despairing; they wish to be famous in literature, war, or art, and the struggle renders them great or petty, bold or cringing; they want to use the world and humanity, not to live in vain, and the effort makes them immortal or ridiculous. But the nobleman is not permitted to strive or seek; it is his duty to live for the object for which he was born; for the preservation of the name, the honor, the grandeur, the spotlessness of his great race, or even his little branch. He may be happy, brave, or talented, but his efforts, struggles and faith must all be concentrated in his name. He may have unworthy love affairs, drink hard, or gamble, but he cannot be a plebeian, as you formerly were, Oswald, for you promised to marry a barmaid, were intimate with day-laborers' sons, provided they were talented students, and even pawned your diamond order when you lacked money. All this is unpardonable; it is treason to your flag, and very

culpable. You are worse than the most frivolous ; you are—”

“ I am fearfully bored !” cried Oswald, angrily. “ Yes, that is the word. Ever since I could think and feel what it was that I was offered and was to represent, I found it all nothing—nothing. My name was an accident, luxury as well as poverty was an accident, the amusements of the dirty inn only served to drown thought, and I constantly felt a thirst which sprang from loathing ! I could not, like any other man, become a poet, though my mind was full of songs ; I could not be a teacher, for I had learned nothing, or a hero, for we had constant peace, which made me idle. I found love monotonous, intoxication too short, struggle hopeless, and my rank hollow. I became what I became. Now I have done. But I believe I could play my part as the head of a family as well as any other man—I only need to become *blasé*. And what more ?”

“ What more ?” said Count Leuthold, drawing a long breath as he sank back in his chair, and then continued, with his usual graceful courtesy : “ If, while preparing for satiety, you would kindly lay aside some trifling French customs, which come directly from the Quartier Latin, and often lead to awkward situations—*pour le moment*.”

“ Ah, and this is said to set an example of—”

“ This is said to set an example of frankness.”

“ Frank—”

“ Yes, I have the greatest esteem and affection for Fraulein Jenny Lorm, but in spite of her aristocratic air she is, after all, only a servant of the highest class. You expressed your opinion of Marie so freely before her—”

Count Oswald burst into a shrill laugh, like any student of the Quartier Latin. “ Here is the mouse ! Is the mountain relieved ? I will even try to fall in love with Countess Marie !” he cried, breathlessly.

“ If it is in the way that befits a Kopa, it would be no undesirable thing,” replied Count Leuthold, gravely.



CHAPTER IV.

Herr Ilde's house, in the out-of-the-way corner of the capital, was fairly steeped in blood; but blood that was gradually losing its color; the reflection of a hot, burning sun.

The mortar of the old building, now black with age, glowed like fresh roses, and even the dust-covered windows tried to glitter; the gable roof was bathed in the sunset radiance, and the larks that circled around the chimneys looked like fiery lilies, which some storm had torn from their stalks and whirled away.

The dusty blinds of one of the topmost windows were thrown open, and two heads were illumined by the crimson glow. It was a few days after the ghastly human bundle had dangled from the next sill—amid the universal sympathy of the populace, as the newspapers said.

One head belonged to the black-haired French servant in livery, who was looking for a place; the

other to the young rope-dancer who performed at the Orpheus.

The Frenchman had once been a fine-looking fellow, with a dark complexion and sparkling eyes. Now his face was shadowed by a disagreeable expression, as his handsome light brown livery was disfigured by dirt. His eyes were glassy, and his lips had the strange wrinkles which remind one of withered fruit.

One of the sleeves of his coat had ripped open and displayed a shirt blackened by cigar-smoke. His hat, trimmed with gold lace, rested jauntily over one ear, and seemed so insecure that, in spite of the crowd, a boy had leaned against the wall of the opposite house for half an hour, ready to spring forward and run away with it as soon as it fell.

The rope-dancer beside the Frenchman seemed in comparison a perfect Adonis; young as a radiant cherub, with a flower-like face, and a smile that might have suited a young girl; yet for all that not a fibre of his soul was unsullied by corruption.

“To hang himself!” said Monsieur Jacques, plaintively, balancing his hat so recklessly that the vagabond below held out both hands and looked up with greedy eyes. “So unexpectedly, too! He comes here, asks Herr Ilde to give him a night’s lodging, because he has found two florins and wants a quiet sleep; Ilde gives him the room rented to the little

factory girl, who never comes home; he goes to sleep, and the next morning hangs himself. By his own suspenders, too! And out of the window. It gave me a shock, Rodolfo; I shall never get over it."

Rodolfo, a native of the capital, who, like every rope-dancer, has given himself a foreign name, has already heard this story eight times within the last four days, and now makes his stereotyped answer: "Yes, it's very queer." So saying, he turns back into the room, seizes Monsieur Jacque's constantly emptied and refilled flask, and takes a long pull, which reddens his handsome Grecian nose.

"And now," continues Monsieur Jacques, who, during the last four days, has really become hypochondriacal and thoughtful, "why did the stranger do this? That is the strangest part of it. He came into my room the evening he spent the night here, and asked for a match. I had just come home from trying to get a place, and was drinking some brandy, so I offered him some, and we fell into conversation. He did not sit down, but stood leaning against the door. While he was talking, he spilled half the contents of the glass, then looked at me as if he had been drinking, and said: 'I want to try to get one more night's sleep; I've had none for a week. In cellars underground, between the scaffolds in new buildings, in barns, but could succeed nowhere

Now I'll try it once more in a room, as I have money enough!' 'Are you sick, monsieur?' I asked. He looked at me again as if he were drunk, and said: 'Did you ever kill anybody, comrade?' Now you must know, Rodolfo, I can hear anything talked about except murder; I have weak nerves."

"Yes," said the handsome, childish-looking youth, seizing the flask again.

"Well, and this fairly overwhelmed me. 'No,' said I. Then the man answered: 'That is lucky. But even if you had, it wouldn't matter. Only you could never sleep any more.' You see, Rodolfo, that made me shudder. I'm none of your saints; I can say I have tried my hand at many things, but the look and manner in which the stranger said those words sent a chill through me. Perhaps I am a worthless fellow; I ought to work, and I—I would rather get my money some other way; but I shouldn't like to look and feel like that man. Then I remembered that once in my young days I heard a preacher say, 'when a man is idle or steals, he may easily be led on to commit a murder.' It has never left my mind. If I could get a place now, I really believe I would take it. You can't think how I felt the next day when I saw that man with his feet out of the window, hanging by his own suspenders—because he couldn't sleep. Rodolfo, I have made up my mind to take some situation."

Monsieur Jacques spoke as if a thousand gentlemen were on their knees imploring him to enter their service; but any one who saw his bleared eyes and haggard face would have avoided trusting to the good resolutions of this man, who "had never yet killed any one."

Rodolfo made a face, for the flask was empty, and rose, heavy with the brandy he had drunk. The sunset glow had suddenly disappeared; the room was damp, gloomy, dirty; the larks had vanished; even the sky seemed spotted with black, as if it had not been washed for some time, and the air was chilly.

"Are you going already, Rodolfo?" said Monsieur Jacques, mournfully.

"Yes, it is time for the performance to begin," replied Rodolfo, with his girlish laugh. "Adieu, comrade."

"But you won't leave me alone now, when you know I have been afraid to stay in this room after dark--ever since that time," said Monsieur Jacques, shedding maudlin tears.

"Pshaw!" replied Rodolfo, with a scornful laugh. The lad was just seventeen, but he would have understood anything sooner than fear, repentance, or thought. Ever since he could remember, he had spent his nights in the brilliant rooms of hotels, heavy with the fragrance of wine, under glittering

gas chandeliers, or in gloomy wine cellars, reeking with the fumes of liquor; he had seen and heard every species of wrong; had gazed at young girls writhing in the agonies of remorse or intoxicated with happiness, but neither remorse nor joy had lasted, only a consuming thirst, the thirst for luxury. Rodolfo lived in warmth and fragrance, or in the streets—according to the ups-and-downs of the season. But he must always have a *bonbon* to crunch, a glass of cordial to sip, and a tiny bottle of spring-flowers to sprinkle over his vain little person. Each fibre of this young soul was thoroughly corrupt. There are graves from which, on resurrection morn, no ray of light can stream to unite with the universal flood of radiance.

He took his pretty velvet cap from the nail.

“Come with me, then, old fellow,” said he. Monsieur Jacques pressed his lace hat more firmly on his head, and they passed through two or three streets and then reached the Orpheus, where the gas-jets were already flaring, and the French singer, Mademoiselle Louise Philipo, was warbling “*Ah ! j’en veux t’y !*” and prancing over the stage like a young colt.

Monsieur Jacques remained alone in the streets, where the sky was still gray, the gas burned dimly, and the people hurried to and fro about their evening vocations.

He had stopped directly before an intelligence office, and, leaning against the window, stared steadily into vacancy, uncertain where he was, when a clerk sitting in the room tapped on the pane and beckoned to him.

Monsieur Jacques slowly straightened himself and staggered in. The clerk looked into a large book and then handed him a card. "This time there is something for you, Monsieur!" said he. "A family wants a Frenchman, without making any conditions. You were here yesterday? The price is two florins now, and two more if the place is accepted." Monsieur Jacques was not yet perfectly sober. He only knew that he was to pay something, and, with a drunkard's carelessness of money, felt first in one vest-pocket, then in another, and at last grasped his dirty florins, two of which he threw on the pale clerk's table, and then found himself again in the crowded streets.

It had grown much darker when Monsieur Jacques came out; so dark that the gas lamps on the empty bridge cast a bright light on the stone balustrade, the water, and the gathering mist. Monsieur Jacques had regained his swaggering air. He paused under the nearest lamp and read the card: the name and address. Then he tore it mechanically into five pieces and threw them into the river, but they disappeared in the fog before

reaching the water. "It must be nearly eleven o'clock," he muttered, as if roused from a dream. "I am confoundedly late. And Louis was to be ready with his crowbar at ten."



CHAPTER V.

The day when a new member of a family circle enters a household, and becomes a sharer of its daily life, and all the various shades of social intercourse, arouses a feeling of anxiety in every class. .

In the hut, where individual existence is as confined as in the galleys, as well as in the palace, where each separate path winds gracefully over the turf of life, without crossing any other.

Such was the case to-day in Castle Kopa.

Count Leuthold, with all his aristocratic ease, had an air of peculiar importance as he gave Fraulein Jenny the most detailed instructions in regard to the preparation of Countess Marie's rooms. Count Leuthold was a man who wished to be sure that everything in which he was concerned would be chivalrously and punctiliously executed.

Count Oswald, holding a cigar between his white teeth, laughed, shrugged his shoulders, thrust his hands into his pockets and murmured: "*Taut de bruit pour une petite fille de plus ou moins qui sera bein*

aise de manger a discrétion. Leuthold is happy when he can play Don Quixote and patron at once."

Little Flora arranged her playthings, and holding a large doll dressed in red silk, ran after all the servants, and then up to Fraulein Jenny, saying: "Cousin Marie is eighteen years old. She will be very tall, won't she? And won't play any more? I wish she had been smaller."

Fraulein Jenny was everywhere. Her slight, delicate figure, clad in its gray silk dress, moved quietly through the various rooms and corridors.

"Have you aired Countess Rinkhausen's curtains, bed-quilt, and table-cover?" she asked the French maid, Rose, as she stood on the threshold of the rooms assigned to Countess Marie, jingling her little bunch of keys. She always directed the household affairs, for she had reached the point of making herself thus indispensable.

Rose, Mademoiselle Rose, who was standing at one of the windows, turned impatiently. "Why, yes, I've been told to do so a dozen times already."

"But the work does not seem to be accomplished yet," said Fraulein Jenny, in her usual gentle manner, but her eyes had a steely glitter. "You will be good enough to attend to it at once, Mademoiselle Rose, or it will grow too late."

"Mademoiselle Rose will be good enough to twist your neck at once!" muttered Rose, with an

angry light in her large black eyes, as she impatiently left the window.

Rose did not like the governess. As a general thing every maid hates every governess, because the latter stands on the same footing as the family, without really being anything more than a servant. In this special case, however, Mademoiselle Rose's antipathy to Fraulein Jenny was particularly great, because Fraulein Jenny—without having the least suspicion of it—had aroused a Platonic affection in the heart of the little fair-haired *valet*, Heinrich; and Mademoiselle Rose would willingly have ruled this heart herself. Moreover, she believed the governess to be a timid, weak, gentle, feeble person, and, therefore, took no trouble to conceal her contemptuous dislike.

“What did you say, Mademoiselle?” asked Fraulein Jenny, as Rose passed her with a toss of the head.

“I? Nothing,” said Rose, scornfully; “perhaps people are not allowed to hum or even think here?”

Now Fraulein Jenny thought Countess Marie's arrival the best and most suitable opportunity to make the servants feel her authority. She did not yet know Countess Marie, the new relative who was to find shelter here; perhaps she might wish to meddle with the housekeeping; who could tell? All the servants would, of course, take part against

the governess, so now or never was the time for Fraulein Jenny to let them feel the iron hand under the velvet glove.

The little, frail, delicate creature advanced a step toward Rose, so that she prevented the latter's progress, and said, with a sweet smile, "I think, Mademoiselle Rose, I have often noticed that you do not seem to find it agreeable to execute my orders. It grieves and annoys me, for I like to have the goodwill of all, even my inferiors. Besides, I have a sensitive disposition, and it is unpleasant for me to be compelled to make a change in the household."

The words were uttered pleasantly, courteously, even with a smile, but in a perfectly distinct tone. Fraulein Jenny had lived in Paris a long time, and spoke French wonderfully well. She gave Rose to understand that she was mistress here, and had the saucy Frenchwoman completely under her control. The dainty, smiling, graceful little kitten was suddenly transformed into a tigress, and dared to threaten her—her, Rose, with dismissal. For a moment Rose's eyes glittered like two will-o'-the-wisps. Something made her fingers twitch, then she bent her head, and with one or two muttered words, left the room. The words really sounded like "*on y va!*" uttered in the gentlest, most submissive tone; but on reaching the other side of the

door, which she softly closed, Rose stood still and stared at it as if it had been some living creature.

Fraulein Jenny saw nothing of this. The little thing glided quietly through the rooms, smoothing a fold here, straightening something there, and then left the suite of apartment playing with her keys, and smoothing her shining hair. The corridor was empty. Darkness was beginning to close in. A dreary evening ended a dreary, cloudy day.

Fraulein Jenny looked into the different rooms as she passed along; paused at one of the large windows and called to the gardener, who was tying up some rose-bushes, that he had forgotten one behind the espalier, and then went into her own room and dressed for dinner.

Two or three crows, flying through the darkness, uttered shrill notes, announcing the coming of a storm. The evening sky had changed from gray to black, and a damp wind blew through the trees.

Count Leuthold was already in the dining-room, eating gherkins from a glass dish. Servants were moving to and fro, uncovering the various dishes. Count Oswald entered, and tossed his cap on a little table. "It is horrible weather; I went out to ride, but it's as damp as a cellar."

"Yes. Countess Marie will have a disagreeable journey to-morrow," said Count Leuthold.

"Countess—? Ah! yes. Good Heavens! she

will be so glad to come here that she won't grumble about the weather."

"Has the carriage been sent over to the station, that it may be there early in the morning, when the train arrives?" asked Count Leuthold, turning to one of the servants.

"Yes; Fraulein Jenny has already given the order," the man replied.

Count Leuthold bent his head. "Fraulein Jenny is a pearl," he cried. "She thinks of everything. I should not know what to do without her."

"How did you manage before she came?"

"Before Fraulein Jenny came? Why, Frau Schmidt was here, and the governess, who was a perfect dragon. And Frau Schmidt was always at the point of death. Fraulein Jenny is a perfect treasure. She smoothes everything. When we are all out of temper she puts us in good humor again. Don't you feel her influence, too?" said the old count, with the lazy enthusiasm natural to a fat man. As far as his dignity allowed, he really idolized Fraulein Jenny.

Count Oswald's laugh had a peculiar sound. But it only lasted a moment, then he nodded assent. "I only wish the blessing would extend itself to this room; I am hungry."

"Good evening!" said Fraulein Jenny at the

same moment, as she entered with little Flora.
“Am I late? *Mais Flore, qui était si ebouriffée !*”

* * * * *

It rained all night long, and rain greeted the dismal morning, which hardly emerged from the twilight of dawn. The bushes in the park were dripping with wet, and looked like weeping willows, for their branches touched the ground. Tiny streams of water had made channels for themselves in the avenue, and rushed along like little brooks. A mist obscured even the nearest objects. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when the carriage sent to the station of Dreibrücken returned to the castle. A pretty, pale-faced young girl sat within, attired in black, with a gray hat, from beneath which fell long dark curls. Her eyes were somewhat reddened by the journey, but not her cheeks. The rain-water ran off the sides of the carriage in little streams, and the whole vehicle glittered with moisture, while the windows were dimmed as if by frost. The horses toiled wearily against the wind, which pulled at their manes, and the branches of the trees along the avenue brushed the carriage. Countess Marie Rinkhausen often gazed through the windows, after wiping them with her gray gloves. The young girl had a resolute little face; an expression of rare energy appeared in the lines between the arched eyebrows, but as she looked through the

rain at her new home, her clear eyes grew sad, and the hand with which she drew the shawl closer round her was not quite steady.

There is no feeling so sad as that of being alone in the world, and commencing a new future among strangers, and this feeling rests with double weight on a girl's heart, even were it the boldest and proudest.

At last the carriage rolled through a gate, and passed from the soft, silent clay road to the wet, creaking sand of the avenue. The rain seemed to become even more violent as the horses stopped before the terrace. At the door opening on the flight of steps stood a smiling young girl, whose fair hair was tossed by the wind—Fraulein Jenny. She was wrapped in a gray cloak. A servant came down the steps with an umbrella. Countess Marie alighted, and the footman accompanied her to the smiling girl. "I am Countess Flora's governess," said Fraulein Jenny, with a courteous, graceful bow, as she retreated under the portico; she had been standing on the upper step in the rain; "and here is Countess Flora."

Then Count Leuthold emerged from the dusky hall, and kissed and welcomed his niece with affectionate, chivalrous courtesy. Count Oswald, too, came forward and offered her one hand, keeping the other in his coat pocket. For a few minutes

there was a confused, incoherent conversation, and the poor young stranger, Countess Marie, felt chilled even while she smiled.

Then Fraulein Jenny took her to her own apartments, that she might dress and make herself comfortable. At the door of the suite Rose appeared, and with a low courtesy asked if she could be of any assistance to the young lady. Countess Marie, however, declined her services for the present, and Rose, with a still lower courtesy, retired. Fraulein Jenny accompanied Countess Marie to her dressing-room, where her trunks were already standing. The young girl approached one of them, unlocked it, opened the lid, and rose. She had not yet laid aside her shawl, and before she did so threw herself into the nearest chair, and began to cry.

Fraulein Jenny opened her eyes like Clarissa Harlowe, and examined the embroidered ends of her belt, then timidly looked at Countess Marie's curls, and said: "It is a pity that your first day here should be a rainy one, countess."

It was a dreary afternoon. The dull, gray sky was made still darker by the veil of cold rain. This uniform, wet, gloomy firmament extended over the meadows which lay in the rear of the castle. These meadows looked like moors. In the distance appeared a few crooked trees and some brick-kilns, which in the daylight resembled ruins. Across

these meadows a broad road ran to the station of Dreidrücken. Fraulein Jenny was in Countess Marie's room. She had come to help her unpack or arrange her clothes, and while she helped talked merrily. Countess Marie felt almost cheerful and at home in the pleasant, bright atmosphere Fraulein Jenny understood how to create, even amid these gloomy surroundings.

"Ah! if the rest of the days are only happy it will not matter if the first is rainy," said Countess Marie, putting the last pile of handkerchiefs into a drawer, and turning her clear, calm eyes toward the window. "I am a perfect stranger to my kind relatives. Count Leuthold is a generous guardian, but a guardian whom I do not know, and the thought makes this place seem dreary—far more dreary than the weather."

"Oh! Count Leuthold is the beau ideal of a man," said Fraulein Jenny, smoothing a pile of clothing; "the very beau ideal!"

"And count Oswald?"

Fraulein Jenny was silent, and smoothed a second pile.

Countess Marie looked up from the handkerchiefs with which she was playing. She thought Fraulein Jenny had not heard her, and repeated the question.

"Count Oswald? Oh! of course he is one, too," replied Fraulein Jenny at last, without the slightest

shade of embarrassment. "There; now everything is in order. You are settled, Countess, except the few touches which must be given to rooms by their occupant."

Countess Marie stood still in the centre of the apartment and looked around it. Gloomy as was the day, the comfortable furniture, and especially the active, graceful figure of the governess gave the chamber a home-like air, and she uttered a sigh of relief. The beautiful young orphan, in her black dress, and dark floating curls, formed a striking contrast to the childish ever smiling, fair-haired governess. She went up to the latter and gave her a grateful kiss. Countess Marie's manner was by no means caressing, but with all her quiet dignity she possessed a cordial warmth which far surpassed any gushing, noisy tenderness. "How kind you are, Fraulein Jenny," said she. "I almost begin to feel at home here. And I was so anxious!" she added, in a low tone.

Fraulein Jenny smiled very sweetly, and said in her clear, ringing voice: "Indeed! But you must not stay here alone till dinner, and get sorrowful, Countess. Come down stairs; perhaps Count Leuthold is in the library with the newspapers, or else in the billiard-room. You must make yourself at home here, get acquainted with your relatives, and not think any more to-day." She uttered the words

in her caressing, coaxing way, holding the beautiful girl's hand tenderly in hers, so that the young stranger's heart expanded with an emotion of the deepest gratitude. Fraulein Jenny perceived this in her eyes, and amid all their gay talk, thought as they left the room, "I have won her."

The first apartment on the corridor below was the billiard-room, whose door stood open. The dim, rain-blurred windows of the corridor, and the dim, rain-blurred windows of the billiard-room seemed to be lazily ogling each other. As the ladies' dresses rustled along a man appeared on the threshold—brown-haired Count Oswald. "How fortunate!" he exclaimed. "Cousin, or Fraulein Jenny, who will play billiards with me? This horrible weather makes me nervous. I am almost bored to death."

With his usual negligent, haughty manner, he turned back into the room, whither the two ladies followed him. "I must play with somebody. Perhaps you have something to do for Flora, Fraulein, so you shall be the one, cousin." And he added in a low tone, "She must be glad to have something to do here."

Countess Marie bent her beautiful head, only to hold it still higher the next instant. Taking a cue, she approached the table, "*Et les règles qu' on suit ici ?*" she asked,

She had yielded at once, but from this moment a feeling of unconquerable hatred toward her cousin filled the proud little heart.

There was something in his imperious tone, his insolent, authoritative manner, which, like a strong wind, had instantly closed all the doors to her heart. When any one enters a new home the first words uttered exert a decisive influence over the whole future life, and Countess Marie felt that Count Oswald considered himself master of the situation in every respect, and from that moment hated him with the hatred girlish hearts so often instinctively feel. And Countess Marie's heart was strong in all its feelings—silent, strong and resolute.

"Les règles ? Mais ce seront les vôtres !" said Count Oswald, with the careless gallantry that did not even induce him to open his weary eyes as he arranged the balls.

Fraulein Jenny gleefully clapped her little hands.

"Two new enemies!" she cried. "There is nothing so interesting as to see two people play against each other for the first time."

"Where is Flora?" asked Count Oswald, with apparent carelessness, going to the rack and selecting his cue.

Fraulein Jenny looked at him sharply. "Flora is with her friend, the gate-keeper's daughter. She goes there every afternoon," she answered, in a

clear, metallic voice, though with a bright smile. "Come, begin the game. You must know, Countess, I am a very severe critic; perhaps because I play so badly myself."

She went to a little side table, took up her netting and posted herself on a high chair, talking gayly, all smiles and jests. The game began and Count Oswald had the advantage.

"My cousin is very easily irritated," he thought. "And what a musical voice!" He looked at her steadily for the first time. Countess Marie was bending over her cue, and her dark curls concealed the collar of her black dress. The stroke was given, and the beautiful brow again appeared. "It is your turn," she said, coldly. He felt as if roused from a dream. "Yes. What an ill-tempered creature!" he muttered, relapsing into his former train of thought.

Fraulein Jenny still smiled.

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Two hours had passed. The rain had ceased, but a furious wind had risen, which howled fiercely though the dripping trees, and even penetrated the thick shrubbery that surrounded the still ponds, and stirred the dark, deep waters to their lowest depths. Now rainy clouds were sweeping in masses across the sky, and the windows of the castle rattled as if in terror. Dinner-time was approaching, and some

one tapped gently at the door of Countess Marie's room. The latter had finished her game of billiards long before, and was now dressing. In response to her "*entrez*," a pretty brunette face appeared, and Rose entered. She spoke in her musical French, with her set smile, and in a low, respectful tone. She had come to offer her services, and should be very glad to have another mistress, for Fraulein Jenny was no real mistress but only a servant herself, and apparently did not want any sharp eyes around her. Rose smiled very significantly. "Yes," she continued, "and Countess Flora wears her hair over her shoulders, and Fraulein Jenny is so fond of her she almost eats her up. So my place here was almost a sinecure, but now the noble countess has come, and I shall have such a beautiful, kind mistress." And Rose, with true French enthusiasm, courtesied as if to a queen.

Spite of the Frenchwoman's respectful words, there was something strangely urgent in her manner, an exaggerated humility toward her new mistress that affected Countess Marie almost unpleasantly. But she could not entirely dispense with a maid's services, and, therefore, accepted Rose's as we tolerate a beautiful foreign animal.

Rose looked over her dinner costumes, dressed her beautiful black hair, and made a change in its arrangement which was really more becoming.

While thus engaged she talked about a thousand different matters, from the owners of the neighboring castles down to the gate-keeper, whose naughty little girl was always playing with Countess Flora. Then she finished her task and made another courtesy, for the dinner hour had arrived.

It was Countess Marie's first dinner at Castle Kopa.

Count Leuthold was in unusually gay spirits. Flora had always been his spoiled favorite, and he had often kept dinner waiting several minutes when she was playing in the garden. To-day Countess Marie took the seat on the other side, and felt cheered by the cheerful mood of her guardian and uncle, as a ray of sunlight brightens a cloudy spring day. Fraulein Jenny, too, was far more talkative than usual, but her gayety and wit were always kept subordinate to the mirth of others, and never asserted themselves. The lamp over the table burned dimly. It did not know whether to flare up or expire. The wind was to blame. Sometimes a ray flashed unexpectedly from a decanter, and then all the glass seemed dull. Once Count Oswald took a dish out of the servant's hand, saying, "You are terribly awkward." The weather really appeared to affect his nerves, for he was about to do the same thing a second time, but recollected himself and

turned to the governess: "Your favorite dish, Fraulein."

Fraulein Jenny smiled and thanked him.

"But, perhaps--" she said, and, withdrawing her hand, looked at Countess Marie.

Count Oswald made an indescribable gesture, and murmuring something in French, passed the dish to his cousin. She thanked him with a queenly bend of the head and continued her conversation with Count Leuthold about the various events of her journey. "The creature is insufferably proud!" thought Count Oswald, looking at her with cold anger.

An hour afterward Count Oswald came from the library, where he had been looking for a book, into his own room, and found on his writing-desk a small, plain, by no means elegant looking letter.

"A little boy brought it, who said he came from the city."

Count Oswald nodded. Then he sat down at his table and opened "Gil Blas." But he could not read long, the wind moaned so loudly at the window, and he sat still for a time gazing at the book, the most bored, listless, and indifferent of ex-officers. What scenes were creeping slowly over the pages of the unread book, or what dreams were howling at the window! Old, long past scenes, and vanished tones, that sought to press intrusively into his

present life, or new chaotic images which had entered his mind to-day for the first time?

He read no more, but passed his hand over the book as if to efface a dream, and in so doing brushed the forgotten letter. It was a very ordinary epistle, addressed in the usual way, and written on plain paper. He took it, broke the seal, and glanced over the contents:

“ I must speak to you in my own room once more—my room at Ilde’s. Come to the city: I will name the day.
“LINA.”

Count Oswald folded the letter; the lamp now burned so steadily that it no longer cast any changeful play of light and shadows on his wearied face. His eyes, as usual, were half closed; perhaps from fatigue; but the drooping lids might also conceal some other feeling.

He took the note and thoughtfully tore it into five, ten small pieces, which he did not drop on the floor, but placed carefully in his pocket-book.

The wind still continued to howl, perhaps without knowing why itself, shook the roofs, tossed the branches, moaning or shrieking like a maniac in the most incomprehensible, causeless manner. Or did it have a purpose? Is nature only a voice that speaks a language incomprehensible to us, a voice that would fain warn or counsel, and is only intelli-

gible to the lifeless objects around us to which it communicates its own horror? Did the shadow of a coming fate fall more darkly on some life-path that stormy evening? No. No shadow from without entered the castle. The windows were brightly lighted, even those of the coachman, who often sat up reading chivalric romances until far into the night. The gloomy shadows crouched around the glittering building like wailing, fettered slaves, and did not penetrate to the quiet room of the pretty, fair-haired young governess. Fraulein Jenny sat at the closed window, with her head resting on her hand, and had either fallen asleep or was listening to the raging of the storm. Her eyes were fixed on the carpet, whose arabesques they steadily followed, and the gaze was steady and firm, like a warder watching his prisoners.



CHAPTER VI.

The next day was bright and clear ; the wind had died away, the torn clouds permitted the sunlight to pass through them, the rain had collected in large puddles in the park, fields, and avenues ; oftentimes a solitary, belated gust of wind swept through the trees, like a marauder who had been left behind and was wildly seeking the comrades no longer to be found in this sudden silence and new-born brightness.

The inhabitants of the castle could stroll through the park again. Four light dresses fluttered amid the green foliage of the shrubbery. Little Flora was playing with the gate-keeper's daughter, and the flounces and floating plumes darted about like birds amid the shouts of the merry companions.

The dresses worn by Countess Marie and Fraulein Jenny flitted regularly to and fro along the avenue, as the two ladies walked quietly up and down.

"I like such days as this," said Fraulein Jenny. "It seems as if one had returned home after a long

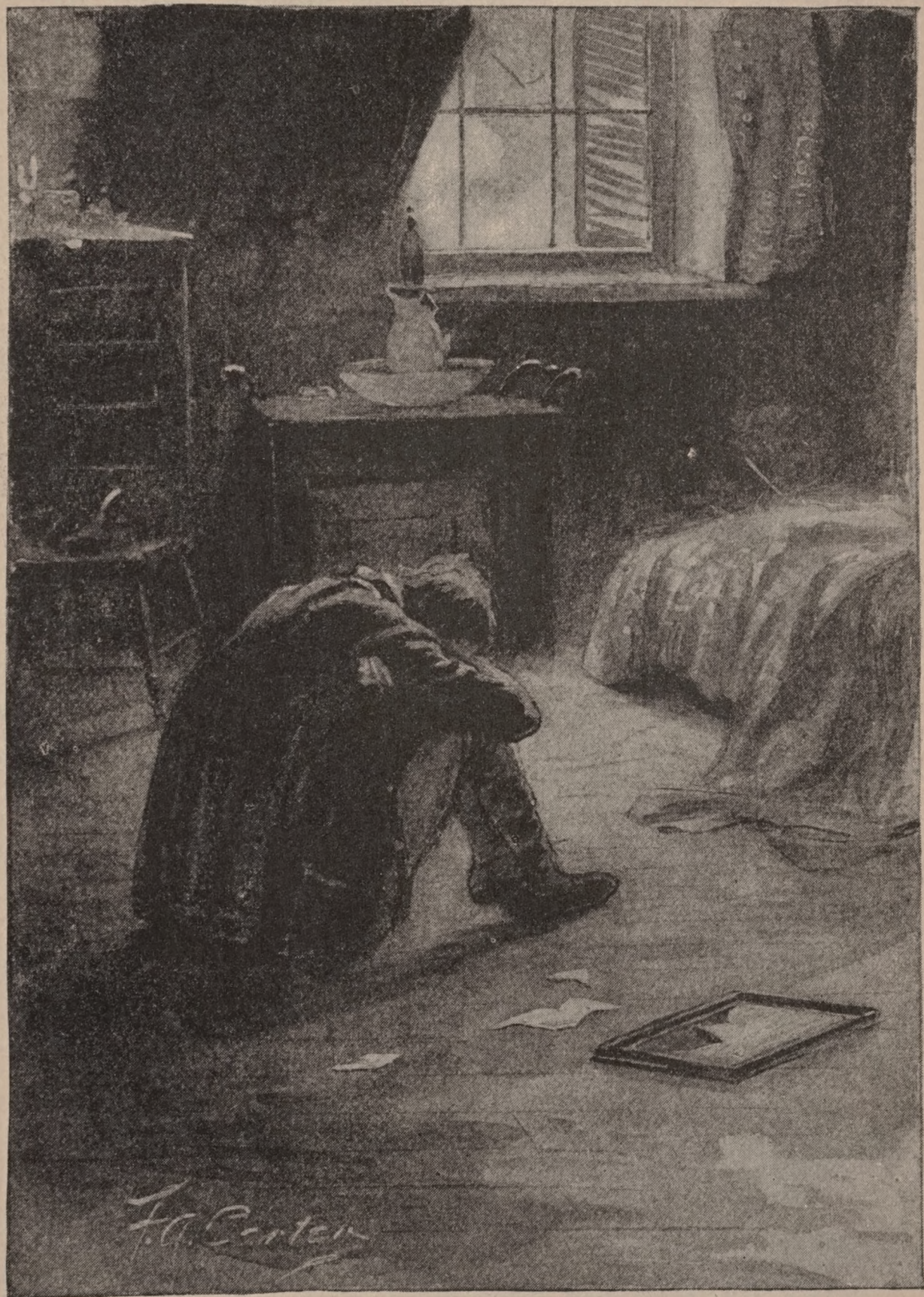
journey," and she plucked two leaves from a jasmine bush, which glittered after the rain as if it had been varnished.

"To feel that, one must feel at home somewhere," said Countess Marie, with a grave, thoughtful face, while her eyes wandered from one tree-top to another.

"And do you not yet feel at home here, Countess?" said Fraulein Jenny, smiling sweetly, while her light hair fluttered in a passing breeze. "Ah! it will be different in a day or two. They all love you so much, and it is so beautiful here. But, of course, when any one has left a home and friends—it is very sad. Was Rinkhaus beautiful?"

"Beautiful?" said Countess Marie, clasping her hands as she walked on. "It was my home. I was born there. When my father died the house was already heavily mortgaged, but mamma would not leave it. I was then a mere child. Ever since that time, mamma always wore black and dressed me in dark colors. We rarely saw any company for we had only a small allowance from my uncle, the head of the family. Before the house was a little garden which papa had arranged himself. Papa had formerly been a colonel, and still wore his long moustache and his scar. And he loved flowers. They say all ex-soldiers do."

"Yes, that is so strange, isn't it?" replied Frau-



HE WAS SITTING ON THE FLOOR.—See Page 107.

lein Jenny, tearing off two new leaves, for the first ones were already destroyed.

“Mamma kept only two servants, a gardener and the cook. We never had a carriage, because the village church was so near. Mamma could not forget papa. She never had any rest, and yet was always so kind to me and never whimsical! From the window of my room I could look directly over to the village. I had a great many toys—a whole room full—and I played with them until one day I suddenly found I had grown too large, and felt ashamed of it. Meantime mamma had taught me everything she knew: to speak various foreign languages and play on the piano. She always said, ‘Perhaps some day you will be obliged to take care of yourself!’ But she was proud, and made me so proud that I—”

Countess Marie suddenly paused, cast a side glance at Fraulein Jenny, and blushed.

Fraulein Jenny smiled. “Oh! yes,” said she. “That you could not bear the thought of serving, of being dependent, even if it were in the most responsible position. I can understand it; I understand the feeling an ancient name must give.”

Countess Marie thanked her with an eloquent glance. “No, I did not mean exactly that, but—”

“But it is so. Why, that is perfectly natural. You will never be a dependent, however, my sweet,

beautiful countess. You will soon be entirely at home here ; as much at home as in your old house."

"Only I must always remain an orphan," said Countess Marie, as if to herself, while her eyes fell. Then she looked up again. "And you, you have been here a long time, Fraulein?" she said.

"I? Oh! I have been in the family nine months, and Count Leuthold is kind enough to think me useful. At first I only took charge of Countess Flora, but the old housekeeper died and I attended to the housekeeping. Count Leuthold found that matters went on very well, so—"

"So you have become a Providence to us all!" said Countess Marie, gratefully. "I have been here just two days, but I could not imagine the great house without you. It is such a strange family. The old count, then Count Oswald, who seems to be just passing through like a leaf whirled along by the wind; a little girl, and no matron."

"Yes, and I am so comfortable here, so grateful to the count and all the others, so happy. I entered the family in Brussels, in answer to an advertisement."

"And before that?"

Fraulein Jenny, without the least hesitation, continued, in an almost monotonous tone: "Before that I was in Paris, with a family named Hardingen,

and before that with Baroness Gaussing, in Geneva. I am from Switzerland, Countess."

"Pray, drop my title, dear Jenny; call me by my Christian name, will you not?"

Jenny blushed scarlet. "Oh!"

"You are still so young, and yet have been obliged to seek so many different homes," said Countess Marie, sadly, pressing the governess' hand with eager sympathy.

Fraulein Jenny laughed. "Ah! if one only has a cheerful disposition, everything is endurable, and the world—even friendly. I used to have many a headache, but was forced to get accustomed even to that." She threw a whole shower of leaves on the ground, and turned away. "*Mais, mille pardons, comtesse, il faudrait voir sè Flora ne s' échauffe pas trop.*" And here is Count Oswald."

Countess Marie hasily overtook her. "I—I will go with you," said she.

The two girls went back toward the meadow. Count Oswald did not quicken his steps, but at last overtook them and was obliged to say something. "Isn't it rather damp and windy to walk in the open air so long?" he said, saluting them in his usual indolent manner.

"But it is such a lovely day," replied the governess, half pouting.

It was indeed, notwithstanding the dampness of

the air, a lovely day. Glittering clouds floated athwart the sun, and gave changeful lights and shadows.

"It is such a lovely day!" said Fraulein Jenny, and added: "I'll venture to say, Herr Count, your anxiety proceeds solely from selfishness; you want to play billiards again."

"Indeed!" replied Count Oswald, lazily.

"But if we left the park, it would be no proof that we should go into the billiard-room," said Countess Marie in her quiet, haughty manner. "However, I really find the air—refreshing as it is—somewhat cool, and have left my shawl upstairs." She bent her head and turned away.

"You wanted to get your shawl; I can surely do that."

"No, I intend to remain upstairs," said Countess Marie over her shoulder.

"She will accept no service," muttered Count Oswald, angrily.

As Countess Marie, in her fluttering gray dress, walked forward along the avenue, with her heavy black curls floating over her shoulders, and her whole figure bathed in the golden sunlight, the vision flashed like a gleam of lightning before the eyes of the indolent, frivolous, *blase* young man. He suddenly became aware that he loved this girl. He had already often done what the French call

“make love,” a term they apply alike to a light flirtation and an absorbing passion, but had never yet felt real love—the love without cause or beginning. The emotion awoke in his heart for the first time, and it seemed as if he heard a low, distinct voice speaking in the depths of his own soul. This was no wild, sudden feeling. He knew it had been there from the first moment of his existence, and would remain until the last. He was not even aware how he loved her. He still thought the new emotion would find expression as it had already done so often. He thought that she was beautiful, and some day he would try to kiss her—as a cousin. He would take advantage of some opportunity when he was bidding her farewell or returning home. He looked after the retreating figure with a softened expression, and his hand rested on the trunk of the nearest tree.

Just at that moment he heard a woman's voice beside him. Fraulein Jenny had cautioned little Flora to be more gentle in her play, and now passed Count Oswald to follow the young countess to the castle. She did not pause, but, smiling sweetly said, with sparkling eyes, while the sunlight cast golden reflections on her shining hair, as she lightly raised her dress to keep it from brushing the turf: “Countess Marie is no friend of yours, Herr Count. You are too dry and sarcastic; you ought to be more

cordial and natural. Your conduct toward her is that of a master, or—a lover.”

She had already passed him, when Count Oswald was roused from his reverie as if by an echo of the low, sharply uttered words. They were strange remarks, by no means proper for a governess to use to her employer ; but Fraulein Jenny was a general favorite and had all sorts of whimsical, original ideas in her little head.

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As Count Oswald walked further away from the castle, with the wind blowing in his face, he took the slender willow branch with which he had been lashing the wet boughs, and in his rage broke it into ten or twenty little pieces, as he had torn the letter the day before. And he kept the pieces, rolling them in his restless hands, until he emerged from the shrubbery on the banks of a still lake, which to-day mirrored the bright sun and golden-brown clouds. He threw the torn letter—which he took from his pocket—and the broken wand into the water, on whose smooth surface they formed little circles whose constant widening he dreamily watched. He had a firm, manly, wonderfully handsome face and the distant Lina, who had written the letter in the city, as well as the person of whom he had been thinking when he broke the branch, were as completely forgotten as these worthless things.



CHAPTER VII.

The following day Count Leuthold was again radiant with importance, for a new wall was to be added to the stables in the courtyard. This dignified, intelligent aristocrat, who filled his position in the councils of his country with the greatest wisdom, possessed a weakness common to many dignified, intellectual, and distinguished personages. He was as important as any ordinary plebeian if even a stable belonging to the castle was to be renovated, and could be seen standing among the workmen for hours, giving various unsuitable orders, to the despair of the builder, and proposing ridiculous changes, to the bewilderment of the laborers. He wandered restlessly about, talked in a very loud tone, related at the breakfast-table everything he had heard about the work early in the morning, asked everybody for an opinion without waiting for an answer, and even neglected his dress and allowed spots of mortar to remain on his black coat. This was the case to-day. Ever since early morning he had made himself as useless and also as annoying

and important as possible at the spot where the building was going on. At lunch he left the food and wine almost untouched, and did nothing but talk. Fraulein Jenny understood his mood, and charmed him by artless, ignorant remarks about architecture, which he could laugh at and correct. Countess Marie at first listened courteously and almost eagerly, but soon relapsed unto hopeless confusion of mind. Count Oswald quietly eat his luncheon, occasionally casting a hasty glance across the table. Little Flora, in her stiffly starched dress was playing with her doll on the balcony.

Count Leuthold soon rose from the table ; he must look after " the men."

Fraulein Jenny went to hear little Flora say her lesson. As she led the child away, she asked amiably : " You will be lonely, countess. Won't you go and look at the building ?"

Countess Marie had risen, while Count Oswald was still devouring a partridge like a hungry ogre.

" I will practice a little," she said. And the radiant sunlight followed the retreating figures to the door of the corridor, where they vanished.

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In the school-room, on the second story, where maps and books lay scattered on the table, Fraulein Jenny opened Countess Flora's books, while that young lady obstinately twisted some of her long

hair around her fingers, standing first on one foot and then on the other.

“We begin Central Asia to-day,” said Fraulein Jenny, with her bright, pleasant manner, as she crossed the room, opened the window, and stood there till the first notes of the piano in the great drawing-room echoed on the air. Then she returned to the table, where Countess Flora, like an elegantly dressed augur, sat twisting her feet impatiently, and the wind played with the green bows on her dress.

Down in the courtyard Count Leuthold was trying to convince the desperate master-builder that the *œil-de bœuf* form was much more suitable for stable windows than a circular one.

“If Jenny were only here!” he at last exclaimed, angrily. “She would agree with me. She has such a quick eye to see the merits of everything!”

Suddenly, in the midst of Countess Marie’s playing, a firm voice said from the doorway: “You like classical music, cousin?”

Count Oswald was standing on the threshold, with his cap pushed a little aside, and his sparkling eyes fixed steadily on the beautiful picture before him—the young girl dressed in black, with the dark curls sweeping over the keys, while her small hands drew forth exquisite harmonies. He already knew

that he loved her—madly. He must show his feelings.

She answered without making any pause in her playing, as if the interruption annoyed her.

He came nearer and spoke again. It vexed her to have any one talk while she was playing. He went behind her chair, bent over her, looked at the notes, and then tried to turn the page. "Thanks, cousin," said she. "It disturbs me to have any one turn the page ; I often repeat whole passages, omit several bars—"

"Pardon!" he replied, with mock gallantry, lifted one of her curls, and gently kissed the soft, perfumed tress. It was nothing, only a cousinly jest. But Countess Marie instantly stopped playing, and turned with an eager, breathless, menacing face. She did not look at him, but resumed her piece, played one or two more bars, and brought it to an abrupt close ; then rose from her seat, closed the book, laid it aside, and, with a slight bend of the head, walked toward the door.

"Are you not going to play any more?" said the count, blushing like a school-boy, as he followed her. "Perhaps you don't like to have any one listen to you?"

She turned her face toward him. The same cold, proud, defiant expression rested upon it. He had insulted her ; she hated him inexpressibly. "Per-

haps so !” she said curtly, and with another regal bend of the head left the room.

“ The little coquette !” muttered the count between his teeth, giving his handsome mustache a fierce pull, while the color deepened in his face.

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Countess Flora, spite of her impatient whimpering, had said her lesson very well, for she hoped in this way to get back to her doll more quickly, but for several minutes Fraulein Jenny had not heard her. She was restless, for she was listening to the music below, which had twice been interrupted by a man’s voice.

The young governess now rose and hastily approached the window. Countess Flora, who was in the middle of a province in East India, looked after her in astonishment.

“ How well Countess Marie plays !” said Fraulein Jenny, whose face was deeply flushed. “ We wont have any more geography to-day. Come down stairs. You can profit by it, Countess Flora.”

But before they reached the door of the room the music had ceased.

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The following morning Fraulein Jenny was standing in one of the large rooms that opened upon the corridor, busied in arranging a heap of roses in two vases. The gardener, who was an adept in the

cultivation of plants, but had no idea of arranging them, always sent the flowers up in a large bundle.

The door of the room stood open. Fraulein Jenny was searching impatiently for the roses, which were almost hidden under a mass of leaves. She had so many little household affairs to direct this morning. And none of the servants passed through the corridor. She was always gentle, even when alone, but several times an almost startling expression of vexation flitted over her face.

Now she heard footsteps and the rustle of a dress. Rose was just passing. Fraulein Jenny's hands were still full of flowers. She called, "Mademoiselle !"

Rose paused a moment. She was carrying some folded underclothes over her arm. "*Plait il ?*" she asked, with a very amiable face.

"Come here a moment and arrange these bouquets ; I have no time to do so," said Fraulein Jenny, gently.

A singular expression flitted over Rose's face, as if she thought the request ridiculous. "Nor I, either," she said, moving a step forward.

Fraulein Jenny instantly threw down her flowers, and walked quickly to the door. Her manner was still as gentle as usual, but she looked rather warm. "No time !" said she. "Really ?"

“Really. I have something to do for the countess. She told me.”

“This is work which will employ half the day,” said Fraulein Jenny, still more gently, looking at the rows of fluting, “so five minutes’ delay will do no harm. You can arrange the flowers in a few minutes. So you will be kind enough to make the bouquets; I leave them in your charge, Mademoiselle.” The governess’ sweet voice seemed to have a steely sound.

Rose smiled and courtesied, a courtesy so extremely low that it seemed like mockery. “I am sorry. But the countess did not give me any permission to delay, and, unfortunately, her orders must be obeyed first. I am sorry.”

After these words the two women looked at each other in almost breathless silence. The governess’ hands were clenched amid the folds of her white dress, as the Frenchwoman’s clasped each other under the folded linen. They seemed to be measuring the distance between them.

No hatred compares with the bitter, burning feeling that sometimes arises between two dependent women. At that moment either would have crushed or strangled the other without the slightest hesitation. Rose had always hated the gentle governess, had openly shown it, and been humiliated and despised by her. Now, however, that Countess

Marie was in the house, she had a weapon, and she uttered a sigh of relief that she could at last bid defiance, legitimate defiance, to the governess.

For one moment Fraulein Jenny's face wore a cat-like expression, such as no one had ever seen before, then she slowly regained her usual composure, though her voice was entirely changed, harsh and unnatural. "You will arrange these bouquets instantly, Mademoiselle, before you do any other work, or you will leave this house to-morrow."

"Will I? Really?"

"You will. Rely upon it." Fraulein Jenny had become perfectly calm again, and did not even wait for Rose's reply, but passed her and went down the corridor. She seemed to think it perfectly natural that Rose would obey. Surely Fraulein Jenny must have a firmer footfold in the house than all—

Rose trembled a few seconds as if she had received an electric shock, and followed the governess four or five steps, but she had already disappeared up the staircase.

Rose sighed heavily, and stood still; then burst into a short laugh. She had changed her mind. The raven hair curled more defiantly than ever around her pretty brunette face. She actually went back into the room where the flowers were, put the underclothes down on a chair, approached the table,

took up the roses, and began to arrange them in bouquets, muttering meantime the strangest words. It seemed as if she were crunching *bon-bons*.

“So. And I can do nothing against you? I am to leave the house, and can do nothing against you? Ah! And I am not to stay here and trample you under my feet, you sweet, silver, golden, adored *canaille*?” The last word was uttered with a most inimitable twist of the tongue. “Oh! perhaps I don’t know that you are in love, blindly in love with a certain Count Oswald? Oh! no. And perhaps I didn’t see you, late one dark evening, go down into the garden, look up at his window, and say aloud, ‘Remember!’ And he came and looked out, and you went on as if you were merely taking a walk? I don’t know all this. Oh! no! of course not. And I shall never find out anything more? I shall never watch you night after night, day after day, till I can spit in your face, you dear, sweet, golden—” And Rose ended the sentence with a word Parisian *cafe* singers use when they speak of some fortunate rival.

Rose had now put two exquisite bouquets in the vases, and was perfectly calm and amiable again. So amiable that five minutes after, still holding the underclothes over her arm, she rapped at the door of the governess’ room, and in response to her come in,” put first her head, and then her whole

graceful figure into the apartment, saying: "I have arranged the flowers, Fraulein, and came to tell you, and ask whether I shall carry them into the large drawing-room."

Fraulein Jenny, who was just dressing to receive some guests expected at the castle that evening, turned with an expression of surprise, in which was blended a shade of some other feeling. "It is not necessary, I thank you."

"Can I be of any assistance in your toilette?" continued Rose.

"I—thank—"

"And—and—I would like to ask your pardon, if I spoke a little rudely. I am so quick-tempered, Fraulein. People must have patience with me." As she uttered these words, Rose moved a step nearer, smiled, pulled timidly at her lace bows, and then, with a courtesy, left the room.

Fraulein Jenny stood motionless before her wardrobe, holding a light silk dress over her arm, and looking intently toward the door through which Rose had disappeared. The expression in her face had now become distinct. It was anxiety, real anxiety.

* * * * *

That evening guests arrived at the castle. Old Count Krok, the owner of a neighboring estate, on his way to Vienna with his four daughters, had

stopped at Kopa, according to a time-honored custom, to smoke a cigar with his old college friend, Leuthold.

Conversation at the supper-table had been very animated, as it always was whenever Count Krok appeared; he repeated the same stories, beginning at the university and continuing to the time of his wedding. Count Leuthold laughed in the same places, and the four young ladies, of whom the eldest was thirty-four, and the youngest twenty-eight years old, talked to their new friend, Countess Marie, whom they had hated from the first moment they saw her. Count Oswald amused himself with the grimaces of the four sallow blondes, and often made some careless remark which greatly enraged them. Countess Flora, who had her dinner in her own room when strangers were present, was brought in after dessert by her governess, and welcomed with shrieks of delight.

Then a game of whist was arranged, in which Count Leuthold and Count Krok played against the Countesses Malva and Orsa. Count Oswald was an execrable whist player. Meantime, the rest of the party went to the piano, and performed some of the long, dreary pieces, usually given when two families spend an evening together. Several new pieces were discussed, and then the conversation turned upon Scholhoff and Patti. The Countesses Norta

and Krappi Krok were thoroughly posted on this subject by the musical papers.

It may be mentioned here that the custom so prevalent among the aristocracy, of mangling ladies' Christian names and making them unrecognizable, had been carried to the greatest extreme in the Krok family. No one had ever discovered—for even the Almanach de Gotha did not betray the secret—from what baptismal names Malva, Orsa, Norta, and Krappi had originated, though an old governess who had been present when the four countesses were christened, declared on her death-bed that Malva meant Melaine; Orsa, Ursula; Norta, Rosina; and Krappi, Charlotte."

Count Oswald maliciously praised the countesses' music, and then said to Countess Marie: "Play the '*Ombra odorata*' you played yesterday, will you?"

The two countesses uttered a shriek of delight, and kissed Countess Marie, while the latter sat down and with a defiant frown, commenced the piece. It seemed as if some unendurable burden were pressing her to the ground, as if some constraint were exerted over her, and she was forced to play only for Count Oswald, who stood leaning over her chair listening, and often exclaiming in careless, arrogant fashion, "Superb." She hated his face, which she knew was behind her, the tone of his voice; she felt his hand resting near her shoulder as she would

have felt the presence of a toad, and her heart swelled with defiance and anger. At last the piece came to an end, but she did not look up. She was trembling as if with some feverish chill.

The two countesses, full of envy, uttered exclamations of delight, and with clasped hands and kisses begged for a longer piece or an improvisation, probably in the hope of detecting some false notes.

“Yes, an improvisation!” said Count Oswald.
“Do you improvise, cousin?”

Countess Marie did not look at him, but with compressed lips laid her hands lightly on the keys. Count Oswald leaned over the back of her chair again.

“Oswald!” cried Countess Flora, from the sofa, where Fraulein Jenny had been tying her hair.

Count Oswald cast a side glance at her, but did not move. The governess now rose and softly approached the piano.

“Count Oswald!” called Flora again. Fraulein Jenny turned, and with a smile laid her finger on her lips to command silence.

Count Oswald muttered something, and looked angrily at the child, but went toward the sofa on tip-toe to hush the little torment. “Will you be quiet?” he said, angrily. “Why did you call me? What do you want?”

Countess Flora looked at him very importantly.

“Nothing. Only Fraulein Jenny said it disturbed people to lean over them when they were playing. She knew that by experience, and I ought to tell you.”

“It sounds as if she were playing tears,” said Countess Krappi softly, in an ecstasy of pretended delight.



CHAPTER VIII.

Herr Ilde's old house in the dingy street always looked shame-faced in the beautiful summer weather. It appeared to crouch away from the blue sky, as a dirty old drunkard shrinks from a gentleman. The sunlight always made it seem to blush with angry embarrassment, for the brilliant rays revealed all its cracks, stains, leaks, and ridges. Herr Ilde's house was certainly not built for summer, only for spring, when the snow melted and dripped from its sloping roof, for autumn, with its damp, penetrating mist, and for winter. And summer was already drawing to a close. A chilly fog was gradually creeping over the sky, making it a dingy white ; a fog which clung to the gutters of the roof, and gnawed at them like some disease.

And this damp mist concealed a hundred forms of loathsome illness, which, when some dry, unhealthy, warm days came, suddenly crept out, fell without warning on the nearest houses, and oozed like mire

through roofs and ceilings, into the unhealthy, foul-smelling rooms.

In this dark, gloomy autumn weather the old house seemed like an asthmatic, wrinkled hypocrite, who cowers shivering in the cool breeze, and is secretly consumed by some poisonous malady.

The house had had so many strange inmates; young and old, sick and healthy. Many had left it to end their days in the hospital, many to die on the highway, in the wet and cold of winter, and many to dance in the air on the gallows. Yet new vagabonds had always come to fill the empty rooms, and the odor of disease and corruption was constantly renewed. The people who lived in the house were really public characters, yet none of them ever made any disturbance. The exterior and interior of the house always remained the same, and the old and new occupants bore so close a resemblance to each other in crime, mystery, and corruption, that they might have passed for the same. The unpainted, dirty walls, dripping with moisture, were so hardened to the constant coming and going, the repulsive scenes of crime, desperation, and despair, so steeled against drunkenness, conspiracies, blasphemies, false oaths, or lonely death-beds, that they seemed fairly stifled under their load of green slime and gray moisture. And in one of the rooms of the

old house, during the last few days, something else vanished. It was not much. Only a face.

During these days the walls of the room where lay the handsome, young, and apparently innocent rope-dancer from the Orpheus, had heard curses, shrieks, groans, and at last low, bitter weeping. A lonely boy had lain there, visited and nursed only by the French *valet* who was looking for a place.

The boyish Adonis, Rodolfo, had "somewhere" imbibed the insidious, terrible disease the common people call the "fever." A fever which either kills or mars the face beyond recognition. For weeks, with bloated features, parched lips, and wandering mind, he had tossed upon his couch, a prey to delirious fancies. So long as he retained his senses, he had implored the Frenchman not to take him to the hospital. "They would ill me there."

He had also mentioned two or three addresses, and on leaving the news of Rodolfo's sickness at these houses, money had been sent to Monsieur Jacques, who waited at the door. Once or twice the vagabond *valet* had called in the crazy old quack who lived in the next house, and was trying to discover the secret of converting old bones into pearls. At last the disease released its victim, but the sufferer could not walk, could not move, and his face was marred, disfigured forever. From his boyhood Rodolfo had been a handsome, smiling butterfly,

radiant in his white silk tights and in his pink or blue clouds of muslin, which floated caressingly around his classic figure. Ever since he could remember, he had lived only in the glare of the gas-lights. He had lived in the glare of the gaslights, and during the day crept like a moth into his dirty hole and slept till evening. From his earliest childhood he had been roused at night-fall, dressed, *rouged*, and then sent to play with death on the trapeze. And he had played gracefully. The boy had already learned the pitiful art of coquetry. He smiled like a negro in the market-place to show his teeth, and bowed like a beautiful doll. He had had his ups and downs in life. When a child he had often been petted and kissed by aristocratic countesses or idle rich men, who had "taken a desperate fancy" to the little rope-dancer. Afterward he had been only too easily induced to share the orgies of the men who always had a few coppers to spare for drink, and then in the early dawn invariably robbed his intoxicated patrons, to whom he had played the part of a viper.

And now the terrible disease called by the German people the "fever" had kept him senseless for weeks, until at last the old quack said: "The danger is over; now you can let me alone."

The danger had passed, but want was close at hand. The rope-dancer had recovered his senses

and ceased to rave, but was still too weak to move. When the French *valet* returned in the morning from "looking for a place," he always sat down beside the lad's bed, said a few words of rough but well-meant consolation, told him he would soon be strong again, and then took a pull at his flask. "I would give you a drink, too, but it isn't safe yet."

The dim gray light of dawn crept slowly over the roofs.

"Have I been sick long?" asked Rodolfo.

"Six weeks! But perhaps you will get out in a few days. What will you do then?"

"Why, go on the trapeze!" said Rodolfo, in his feeble voice, resting his head on his folded arms, which were covered with torn shirt-sleeves, reeking with the contagion of disease.

Monsieur Jacques took a sip of brandy and raised his black eyebrows. "Him, poor lad!" he muttered. "Rope-dancing! With that face!" But he did not say it aloud, only passed his hand gently over the sick boy's arm, and said: "You ought to rest a few months, Rodolfo; have you no relatives anywhere?"

"None," said Rodolfo, sulkily, hiding his face on his pillow.

"Or isn't there any gentleman, any patron, who would give you a little money—till you were entirely cured?"

“The beasts!” muttered Rodolfo, bitterly. “Not one. But I don’t want it. Surely I can work—on the rope—soon. I am much better.”

“Much better!” said Monsieur Jacques, consolingly at the thick, swollen nose, scarred cheeks, wrinkled lips and bleared eyes of the poor boy, who could never be handsome again. He had no more brandy in his flask, and as he gazed and reflected, fell asleep.

When the red autumn sun had climbed slowly and wearily over a sea of roofs to the window of the room, it shone brightly upon the sleeping drunkard and thief, and the sleepless rope-dancer, who counted from one to a hundred, and from one hundred to two hundred, then thought of a little song an old ticket-seller in a little circus—his mother—had taught him, about a maiden betrothed to a soldier who did not return from the war, and at last remembered how his patron, uncle, and guardian used to swear, before he reached the final stage of intoxication and lay motionless.



CHAPTER IX.

Castle Kopa has become very lonely, for its inmates have gone to the city to be present at the opening of the season, at which time Count Leuthold always felt as important as when a new stable was being built. Besides, he must now play the part of guardian to Countess Marie.

“ Marie must not feel lonely ; she must go about and amuse herself,” said he. So Countess Marie was obliged—against her will—to send for dress-makers and buy charming ball and evening dresses, after which she was introduced into society by old Countess Romanesta Rernhagen, a distant relative, who was almost as important and kind-hearted and dignified as Count Leuthold himself. She had quarrelled with the latter all her life, and for a long time had held no intercourse with him ; but Countess Marie was a new bond of union between them. Countess Rernhagen drove up to the Kopa palace four or five times a day, to bring some new orna-

ment, or take Countess Marie to ride or shop. She would have liked to take entire possession of the girl, for she had a mania for introducing young relatives into society, and then if possible making matches for them. The good lady had never had any children, and fancied herself a misanthrope, while she could not exist without gayety. "For Heaven's sake, Leuthold, tell me what you mean to do with Marie? You have Flora. It's just like an old, self-sufficient, selfish bachelor to want the girl to pine away in his mole's burrow."

"Mole's burrow? I want her to amuse herself! I want her to go wherever she likes, and you will introduce her, Romanesta."

"I introduce her? I shall do no such thing. What concern is it of mine? What is she to me? You never let the dear creature out of your clutches. Even if I do, it won't be on your account. It's no credit to you, Leuthold, if the poor girl does have some pleasure. You might at least hit upon the bright idea of making Oswald your heir and marrying Marie to him. That is the only thing you can do. But we must go. Ah! here is Marie already dressed. Come, child, I am glad we can get away. I really make a sacrifice in calling for you when I know this Blue Beard, this Don Quixote, this protector of innocence, who leaves

nothing for other people to do, is at home. I hate all men, but worst of all Leuthold Kopa."

Count Leuthold smiled pleasantly. "You told me that thirty years ago, countess, and have not yet mentioned any reason. You must have felt a special affection for me, which I failed to notice."



CHAPTER X.

“ Ah! I feel as if I were in heaven,” said Rose to the handsome *valet*, Heinrich. Both were in the large, airy room on the ground floor, in which the servants sat and took their meals. Handsome Heinrich had just finished writing a letter to his family in the Tyrol, and Rose had come in to take her plate of soup. She had pinned a little napkin over her dress, and daintily sipped the soup, in which she had crumbled small pieces of bread. “ Yes, I feel as if I were in heaven !” said Rose, enthusiastically, rolling up her eyes. “ I have lived in a great many different places, travelled about the world a great deal, but now I have found an asylum I will never give up. Never, never, never !” She uttered the words with true French emphasis, singing the last ones almost like an *allegro*.

Heinrich, a phlegmatic native of the Tyrol, who was in the habit of serving as a sort of listening machine during mademoiselle’s periodical fits of

enthusiasm, folded his letter and said: "Indeed! Well, yes, the count is kind, and so is Count Oswald—"

"And Countess Marie," cried Rose, taking another spoonful of soup, and then unfastening her napkin. "But what are all of them compared to Fraulein Jenny, the angel—yes, angel?" Rose's eyes and teeth sparkled as if trying to outshine each other, and she crumbled the last bit of bread to nothing in her delight.

"Indeed," said handsome Heinrich, melting some sealing-wax.

Rose might certainly have found a more sympathetic auditor. But she did not care. There were times when she must speak—must practice the art of concealing her thoughts.

"I love Fraulein Jenny," she continued, as if to challenge Heinrich to contradict the assertion.

"Do you?" said he; "you are very affectionate, Mademoiselle Rose." He had no intention of being satirical; he really thought he was saying something agreeable. "No doubt you have already loved a great many people," he continued.

"What do you mean?" cried Rose, rising, "men or women?"

"Why, both."

"Oh! never any man," said Rose, sharply, looking at him with her beautiful eyes. "Never any

man except Jean Lefort, the knave!" And she seemed as if she were mentally grinding Jean Lefort between her white teeth.

Heinrich gazed at her earnestly with his honest blue eyes. He could imagine the whole story, and felt a sincere sympathy for the knave. "Oh!" said he. "Who was this Jean Lefort?"

Rose looked askance at him with a keen, eager face and dilated nostrils. "Jean Lefort," she said, very sweetly, "Jean Lefort was my betrothed husband, monsieur. And he went off to Algiers one night with the Zouaves—"

"Really! And why?"

"Why?" Rose laughed with forced merriment. "Why are all men rascals?"

This remark was unanswerable. Heinrich rose, put his letter in his pocket, sighed, stretched himself so that his red plush breeches, ditto vest, and liver-colored coat all parted company, and then moved slowly toward the door, where he turned as if he had just had a new idea. "And what are women?" said he.

Rose now heard her bell, and, with a shrug of the shoulders, rustled past him. "*Ce que vous en faites,*" said she. "We are what you make us."

She vanished. Heinrich looked after her. "Well, if that is true," said he to himself, "Jean Lefort has made nothing very good of you, Mademoiselle."

Upon my word, I would rather carry a snake in my pocket from Vienna to Innsbruck than ride in a carriage alone with you."

* * * * *

The lamps had been lighted in the streets, and also in the corridors of the city palaces. The candles in Countess Marie's dressing-room were burning, and Rose had just spread out the ball costume, which Countess Flora loudly admired and felt a longing desire to crush. The young girl's apartments were all redolent of the atmosphere of a ball-room. The perfume bottles, the fresh flowers, with their rich exotic fragrance, the rustling waves of silk which now and then moved gently at the slightest draught of air, the clouds of muslin and piles of dainty underclothing instinctively suggested the glare of chandeliers, a gay crowd, dancing and music.

Countess Marie was not excited, as girls usually are on the eve of a ball. Her manner when she came out of the old count's library to commence her toilette was as calm and proud as usual. In the corridor leading to her own apartments she met her cousin Oswald, who greeted her with a smile. "Well, are you already at the ball in imagination, Marie? The first of the season. May I have a waltz?"

Countess Marie bent her head. "If you wish it, cousin," she replied, passing on.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" he said, following her a step. "Whenever I meet you, you seem like a beautiful automaton set in motion by machinery. Or must I be vain enough to suppose that you avoid me? I can never get a moment's chat with you. Why do you so persistently escape me? No, you must answer this one question—now, before the ball. What have I done?"

He spoke earnestly, somewhat angrily, and followed her so quickly that she was compelled to pause. She looked at him with a troubled glance, then averted her large dark eyes and raised her head proudly. "You are mistaken; I do not understand you, cousin. I do not avoid you; but it is time for me to dress for the ball. If you desire a long conversation say so, and I can defer it." And she made him a formal bow.

"The d—— take a conversation," cried the impetuous young man, half despairingly. "You always talk as if I were giving you orders, and thus drive me away. What right have I to demand anything? Am I your master?"

Again she turned her large dark eyes upon him, and once more the quick blood crimsoned her cheeks, but she did not answer immediately. At

last she said : " At least you as well as Count Leuthold are master in this house."

A sudden light dawned upon Oswald's mind, surprise, indignation, and some nameless feeling flushed his bronzed cheeks.

" Oh ! that is ignoble, unkind, Marie. If there is any ruler in this house, it is neither my brother nor I, but you—you, the guest, not the guest, but our benefactress, the woman who brings light and joy into a bachelor's lonely, cheerless home. What am I to say to you ? You show me no feeling save aversion. Now I think I can guess that this pride is the pride of your position. You consider yourself a stranger, when you are the bond that unites the family. You see your pride has no justification, no legitimate foundation. Or do I cast a shadow over this house ? If so, you need only drive me away, for you are its mistress."

He bowed and turned away. Countess Marie had grown very pale, and a strange expression of horror appeared in her face ; now she stretched out her hand—to detain him ? no ; for she instantly let it fall by her side.

Count Oswald disappeared around the corner of the corridor, and Countess Marie seemed to wake as if from a dream. She awoke, but the strange, vague dread did not leave her face until she reached her own room, where, amid the perfumes, flowers,

lights, and clouds of silk, she saw Rose, who welcomed her with a smile, and asked, with a great many unnecessary words, if she were ready to begin to dress, because she would take Countess Flora to Fraulein Jenny at once.

But Countess Marie said there was time enough. She was too much bewildered to devote herself to the details of the toilette. Something had brought discord into her brave, calm, quiet heart, and the Frenchwoman's big brown eyes annoyed her. Mademoiselle was one of those maids whose presence is unendurable only when the mind is perfectly at ease. So Countess Marie said that Flora might stay and see her dress—for which permission Flora gave her a joyful hug. But there was still plenty of time—at least a quarter of an hour. Rose might go away for fifteen minutes.

Nothing could have been more agreeable to Rose. She courtesied as if in the presence of royalty, and left the room. Such a pliant, modest, invaluable maid.

On reaching the corridor she clapped her hands with such a wild, malicious delight, that the lamps under which she was passing shook as if in terror.

“So! He is in love with you! Madly in love! And you are so much in love with him that you must have time to calm yourself before you are able to dress. You are very much flushed, and panting

for breath. Oh, yes! And I should like to kiss your hands for it a thousand times, most gracious countess—no! ten thousand, a thousand, thousand times! *Viola une nouvelle magnifique pour Mademoiselle Jenny!* Oh, yes, *oh! bien oui.*” Articulating the last words like those of a song, and accompanying them with the most expressive gestures, Rose fairly floated upstairs to Fraulein Jenny’s room. She tapped discreetly at the door, and when she entered seemed to kiss the air as she spoke.

Fraulein Jenny had just been reading a French novel by the Countess Dash. She had taken it to pass away the time until called to admire Countess Marie’s toilette, or else to forget the strange anxiety and impatience that had consumed her all day. For some vague dread had really haunted the airy, graceful, fairy-like little governess. She had jingled her keys all day with almost feverish restlessness, and two or three times contradicted her own orders. Toward evening this feeling had revealed itself still more. She had wandered about the house as if on strings, and looked “terribly thin,” as Rose observed. And Rose, who had watched her with delight, added mischievously, “She would like to be at this ball, too—*voilà.*”

Fraulein Jenny’s face, as she glanced up from her book, seemed almost waxen in its pallor by the

light of her little lamp, which was concentrated on the pages by a green shade.

The governess' sitting-room looked uncomfortable in the green dusk. One felt that the occupant "did not live there," as Rose expressed it, that she was not at home amid her surroundings. There are sitting-rooms which always betray their owner's restless hearts.

"Excuse me if I have disturbed you, Fraulein Jenny," said Rose, with her graceful ease of manner. "But I have come to ask a favor."

"A favor?" said Fraulein Jenny. "What is it?"

"I took advantage of the fifteen minutes before the countess wishes to dress for the ball to come up here. I wanted to ask whether I might go out to-night—to the theatre?"

"And why don't you make the request of Countess Marie?" asked Fraulein Jenny. "She is your mistress, as you know, mademoiselle."

"Oh!" said Rose, as if grieved and wounded by some sharp reproof. "Oh! Fraulein, will you never forgive me?" And with true French impulsiveness she made a theatrical gesture of despair. "And besides, it isn't easy to speak to Countess Marie to-day, she is so *preoccupée*."

"A young girl's pre-occupation," said the governess, half to herself. "A ball is still a wonderful thing to her."

"It isn't exactly the ball that occupies the countess' mind," said Rose, with a meaning glance and a faint smile, as she smoothed her apron with one hand, put the other in her pocket, and approached a step nearer, as is the custom with all servants when they have anything to tell. "It's something far more important. Monsieur le Comte Oswald—"

The set smile gradually disappeared from Fraulein Jenny's face as she fixed her large, green eyes steadily on Rose. She still held the French novel in a firm grasp; the green shade lay beside her on the table, and the lamp illumined the whole room. But the governess instantly regained her composure. She knew that she must seem indifferent, and, therefore, began to read again, looking up from time to time, and saying, carelessly, "Ah! you can go when and as you choose, mademoiselle. You know that. No one requires your services except the countess. So Countess Marie anticipates a great deal of pleasure at the ball, and is impatient? Or did you say—"

"Pardon me, Fraulein," said Rose, approaching a step nearer, and her voice sounded as clear as a bell, "I did not say impatient for the ball. I said restless, agitated, for she—she has had a—but you will not betray me, Fraulein Jenny?"

Rose was standing very near the table, and the lamplight gilded her beautiful, keen, dark, southern

face. She had folded her arms, and was bending toward the governess.

Fraulein Jenny's lips were firmly compressed, and the page she was turning trembled in her hand. She ought not to hear what Rose wanted to tell; she was placing herself on a level with the servant. And yet she must know. All the nervous agitation she had felt all day concentrated in a feverish flush, which burned vividly on both cheeks.

"Betray you!" she said, with an inimitable shrug of her shoulders. "Come, go on." And she smiled.

"Well, she has had a declaration of love," said Rose, leaning back to note the effect of her words.

But Fraulein Jenny was a perfect mistress of the art of dissimulation. What strength of mind she must have possessed to keep her set smile, which had gradually changed to a stony grimace. "You are mad!" she said at last, in a strangely clear voice.

"Mad!" cried Rose, in delight, and then, with artless loquacity, continued: "When I hear it with my own ears and see it with my own eyes. Monsieur le Comte Oswald has waited for—ah! so often already, in the corridor, and reproached her, but so tenderly, because she avoided him. And she, Countess Marie, was a little distant; and then he grew angry and said she was mistress of the house and everything belonged to her and he

was her most humble servant and—oh! it was a regular declaration, Fraulein Jenny!” cried Rose, still with the utmost innocence.

A loud laugh blended with the one she was trying to stifle. Yes, Fraulein Jenny actually laughed. “Oh! and what else?” she asked, closing the book and slowly rising. But the movement was too abrupt for indolence.

“Well, then there was an engagement for a dance—and continuation in our next, as the novels say,” cried Rose, in a jesting tone. “But this is only meant for your ears!” she repeated importantly, “and I am sure that—”

“Why?” said Fraulein Jenny, with the same stony smile. “The whole matter is only a jest.”

* * * * *

Countess Rernhagen’s carriage has rolled under the doorway, a servant has rushed up stairs, and Countess Marie, in a beautiful ball dress, with a gold-embroidered cloak thrown around her shoulders, comes rustling down, her tiny feet in their white satin shoes peeping forth at every step.

Count Leuthold’s carriage also drove up, and Count Oswald went to his brother’s room. The servants were very busy, and there was a confusion of shouts, and the creaking of wheels.

Fraulein Jenny had admired Countess Marie’s ball dress before the latter went away, and still

stood motionless in the corridor, while Countess Flora ran on before. As Count Oswald approached the governess, the set smile at last vanished from her face, which became horribly changed. The corridor might have been full of people, but it would not disturb her now, though she was usually so cautious and prudent. Her slender little hand grasped his arm with a giant's strength, her green eyes sparkled with a baleful light, and every muscle in her face quivered as she said, in a low tone, in French, "Remember!" He paused—only for a moment, held more by her eye than her hand, then cast a glance toward the end of the dimly-lighted corridor, bent down to her with a frowning brow and a strange pallor on his handsome face, and said, under his breath, "*Petite folle !*"

* * * *

The ball is over, for it is three o'clock in the morning. Count Leuthold, Count Oswald and Countess Marie have returned home. Countess Marie, spite of her naturally quiet temperament, still hears the music amid her dreams, and Count Leuthold is heartily glad to feel the soft bed under him. Fraulein Jenny's lamp has long been extinguished, and only Count Oswald watches for the dawn. His pale face is visible in the gray light that steals over the opposite house, as he stands at the window awaiting the coming day.



CHAPTER XI.

Herr Ilde's house fairly crouched under the heavy, ceaseless autumn rain. All the narrow, dirty side streets seemed dead. The half decayed clothes which usually hung before the countless reeking, dingy, cellar-like shops had been taken in by the dealers, lest they might lose some of their dirt. The usurers who had their dens here vanished down the narrow, dark streets, collected in knots again, then all disappeared.

One saw neither beastly faces nor battered hats. It was a cheerless day everywhere, on the highways and in the open fields, but more cheerless still in these haunts of crime and corruption, and the dampness, the noise of the rushing rain, and the twilight dimness of this autumn season seemed most cheerless of all in the rope-dancer's bare room.

Rodolfo was no longer in bed. His health was entirely restored, but he had not yet left his room. He was sitting on the floor, in his shabby black coat,

with his head resting on his folded arms, and from time to time a shudder ran through his frame, as a breeze ruffles the surface of a lake. On the chimney-piece were a few copper coins, the last of a bank-note, a relic of the good old days of plenty, which had remained forgotten in the bottom of his purse. The ceaseless rain without darkened the bare, dirty room, and Rodolfo sat motionless, as he had continued to sit ever since, three days ago, he left his bed and looked into the little, cheap mirror which lay broken on the floor.

From time to time the youth raised his weary head and gazed steadily at the torrent without. A terrible, incredible transformation had taken place in the handsome, winning face. The delicate nose had become a red lump; the eyes were bleared, the lids drooped, the lips were parched, the cheeks seamed with scars.

What thoughts had passed through the lad's heart at the first sight of this destruction, ere it hardened into this unnatural, horrible repose?

He had become hideous. A creature from whom all would recoil. He was unfit for the only profession he had learned and could follow. Weak and dishonest from his earliest childhood, he knew how to do nothing except to perform his easy tricks and sell his stereotyped smile for a certain price. And now he was like a wood-cutter who had lost both

arms. At the first moment his feelings had only been a horrible despair at the thought of his lost beauty—a sudden madness; then a terrible dread had crept into his mind, a dull, heavy, oppressive fear, the fear of hunger, of ruin, of the future. He was so utterly alone in the world. It had not been so while he possessed his smiling, rosy, winning face. Among rope-dancers beauty is the most lucrative of all qualities.

By degrees the sudden terror and dull rage had merged into tameless fury. A fierce hatred and envy of all who were rich, handsome, or beloved gnawed at the hitherto joyous heart, and already bore a luxuriant crop of poisonous blossoms. So he sat brooding sullenly, often uttering low groans, and rocking to and fro, and for the first time in his life avoided the streets where he must meet people, asked himself what he should begin to do, and gnashed his teeth and cursed a God in whom he had never believed.

Monsieur Jacques was also at home to-day. It was no weather to “look for a place.” There were no crowds on the bridges and at the corners of the streets, and he only looked for a place on days when a number of people collected together. Then he always brought home a great many handkerchiefs, snuff-boxes, and purses, which, in the quiet, hot hours of noon, he spread out and arranged in piles.

In the evening he began his quest again, and when morning dawned returned from his useless work in taverns and wine cellars, refreshed and comforted. But this wet day was no time to look for a place, and Monsieur Jacques had slept till noon. Now, drowsy and yawning, he came to his neighbor's room. His livery looked as if it had been dragged through all the puddles in the streets.

"What, lad, on the floor again?" he yawned. "When will you be yourself once more? Here, take a drink." And he pushed the boy with his foot. The latter raised his distorted face. He blushed whenever he met the servant's eye, for he was ashamed of his own ugliness. It was the only shame he had ever been taught.

"What am I to do?" he wailed, like some wild animal. "What am I to do?"

"Why, are you still brooding over the thought that you can't go on the trapeze any more?" said Jacques, kindly, as he sat down on the ragged bed and took a long pull at his flask. "Come, come, it's better to beg than be a rope-dancer. Such a constant risk of breaking your neck. You must 'look for a place.' As I do!"

The rope-dancer stared at him. "Only steal!" said he.

There was something terrible in the tone in which the boy uttered the words, "Only steal;" something

akin to the thirst of some savage animal which has smelt blood, and now tugging at its chain is forced to content itself with bread. Ever since Rodolfo could remember he had always lived in the intoxication of applause. He had sung, revelled in the excitement of his dangerous feats, then in wine, and then sin. He had profaned, desecrated all that makes youth beautiful. He had bitten the hand that caressed him, been loaded with presents and robbed the givers. And now that he had become loathsome, deformed, useless, he could only steal. The words that came from his lips were more terrible than the ~~c~~ry of want and hunger; it was the sigh of the man, who, enervated by luxury, is no longer satisfied with bread—even the bread of sin.

“Only steal!” These three days of mute despair had changed Rodolfo into a horrible creature. His heart burned with a fierce hatred of all who were rich, beautiful, beloved, and happy.

“Well, and you will have enough to do!” replied Jacques, consolingly. “Here, take another drink. I have always liked you, my boy, and regretted that you were wasting the best days of your life. We have something to do to-morrow. I, Wilhelm, who lives below, and whose face no one has ever seen and Kopp. A splendid chance. Ilde told us of it. You will soon learn when you have looked

on once or twice. And don't be afraid if I introduce you. Here take another drink."

Rodolfo drank greedily, thirstily, and then once more laid his head on his folded arms, and let Jacques talk on, while the rain plashed, and the twilight cast changeful shadows on his cowering, motionless figure.

She paused a moment before the house, in the midst of a puddle which had formed in a hollow in the uneven pavement, and looked around, perhaps to see if any one were following her. But the street was silent, empty, and deserted, except for the loud plashing of the rain. The young girl wore a coarse black woolen dress, a black shawl, and an old black hat. She opened the door with a key, lighted a small wax candle, went up the well-known stairs, and unlocked the door of her little room.

This little room contained only the most necessary furniture—a bed, a table, and two chairs ; but it had one remarkable peculiarity. Fraulein Lina often left it perfectly neat, and four weeks after found the floor covered with mud-stains, the bed disordered, and some of the window-panes broken. Fraulein Lina, however, was a quiet, gentle, considerate lodger, and never complained, and it was said that on this account Herr Ilde, though he had never seen her face, cherished a secret tender love for her in his withered old heart.

Fraulein Lina drew a candle out of an old knitting-bag, adorned with faded embroidery, put it in a candlestick, and lighted it. Then she laid aside her black woolen shawl, and removed from her hat the disfiguring black veil, which looked like the mourning weeds worn by a mute at a funeral.

Her fair hair had grown heavy and damp with

moisture, and she smoothed it with her little thin hands. It was wet with the rain, and Fraulein Lina shivered. Yet dim as was the light of the candle, it justified the secret love with which Herr Ilde was jeeringly charged ; for Lina was a beautiful—nay, a very beautiful girl, small and delicate as an elf. Her clearly-cut features looked as if they were carved from ivory, and her large eyes sparkled brightly. The young girl also drew from her knitting-bag an article which seemed by no means appropriate : a little watch, that glittered like a cluster of diamonds ; looked at the hour, and then paced up and down the room. It grew colder and damper the longer she remained in the chamber, and Lina shivered, took the thick shawl, wrapped it closer around her, and then sat down at the table and watched the candle melt and run away, watched it with a white, calm, resolute face, from which one might expect anything. And in this attitude, listening to the ceaseless rush of the rain, she waited, until the door below opened, the stairs creaked, and a hand groped for the handle of her door ; then she rose and turned her face toward the new-comer.

A tall, broad-shouldered man, clad in a rough coat, with a cap drawn over his brow, and a plaid shawl, entered, dripping with water, but with a bright smile on his handsome face.

“Brr!” said he. “It’s horrible weather, and here I am.”

“Good evening, Oswald,” said Fraulein Jenny—for Lina was known in [Count Kopa’s palace as Fraulein Jenny Lorm—but there was no trace of her usual sweet smile on the stern, resolute face, and she wrapped herself more closely in her black shawl.

* * * * *

Besides the chilly dampness, the dim light, and the monotonous plashing of the rain, a vague, indescribable feeling rested on the room and weighed upon the hearts of both. Count Oswald tried to speak and laugh naturally, shook his shaggy coat, and leaned against the mantel-piece. Fraulein Jenny, who was so different here from the person she seemed in the count’s house, sat in silence for a time beside the old rickety table, her silky, golden tresses just visible within the circle of light.

“How long it is since we have met here,” said Count Oswald, showing his white teeth.

“Yes—it is a long time,” replied Fraulein Jenny, in her low suppressed voice, with a strange expression on her keen, eager face. She looked even more beautiful than when she smiled, but there was a gloomy expression in the eyes, which gleamed with a cold, green light. “Yes.” She was silent a moment, as if to take breath, then said quickly,

abruptly: "A truce to fine speeches. If I have troubled you to-day, after so long a time, Herr Count, it is because I want to tell you a story."

"A story?" he asked, with another smile, that sparkled in his eyes and revealed his white teeth, as he leaned over her chair. He felt as if he were fettered. Not for the world could he have taken her hand, even as he had done at their last meeting here. A gulf yawned between them.

"Yes," said she. "A story. It is perhaps two years, Count Oswald, since a pleasure-loving gentleman came to Paris—without money. He was a German, a man of the world, a *bon viveur* of the first rank. He had means enough to last a month, then his resources were exhausted; for while in the army he had squandered his little fortune, incurred enormous debts, and at last quarrelled with his brother, the head of the family. So he went to Paris to study, and hide his poverty among strangers. During the first month he had a box at the opera, visited the families of all the German nobles he knew, frequented the Jardin Mabille, and spent his nights at fashionable *cafés*. In one of these aristocratic German families he made the acquaintance of a governess, a young girl."

Fraulein Jenny paused, with compressed lips, staring fixedly at the light.

"And he loved this girl," said Count Oswald,

showing his white teeth, in an attempt to conceal his discomfort.

Fraulein Jenny slowly turned her large, dark eyes toward him, and he seemed to be under the dominion of some spell.

“ He loved this girl, and took her soul and heart. I belonged to you, Oswald. I was neither your betrothed bride nor your wife ; I only knew that I belonged to you for my whole life. The magic power of love constrained me. You still had many of the ideas common among officers, and took the matter more lightly, carelessly, and ardently. It was an indescribable time—a time of happiness which can never return, never, never. Days passed such as can be experienced only once in a life, when we seemed to the world the merest strangers, and in stolen moments clung to each other, as if the world contained nothing except ourselves. But they could not last. Your money was exhausted, you were compelled to join the dissolute students in the Quartier Latin, and could no longer visit in fashionable society. The family in which I lived regretted your absence, but we still met, and our love daily increased—there was no room in my heart for anything but you. My employers at last became suspicious. Scenes followed, scenes in which love, pride, and happiness made me forget all prudence. I broke every tie, left my situation, and came to

you ; I sat in a *fiacre* and sent a message to your room, and you came down to the carriage, put your arms around my neck, and called me your betrothed bride. I became your betrothed. I rented a room in the house that adjoined the one where you lived, and was known there by that name. I loved you ; I had patience and could wait. And we waited. You wished to make a career for yourself, and I served, and had a little bird-cage in the window, and dusted the trifles you gave me. I had a view of the roofs, and while I served counted the moments till you came."

Fraulein Jenny paused again.

Count Oswald rubbed his hands and forced himself to laugh. " Ah ! those were happy days.

*" T'en souviens—tu ma vie
Du jour."*

" Yes, they were happy days. Florine and Nanine, the friends of your friends, Loto and Labrousche. How we laughed—Sundays in the green country, whither we went in rude wagons. How young and hopeful we all were ! But time passed, and both you and I saw that you were too idle, too much spoiled, too gay, or too weary to begin a new career, especially to learn anything. The whole had been only a beautiful day-dream. And want came. Want came, and reason sobered

our love without lessening it. If we were in earnest about our future plans, there was but one way of being united. You must be reconciled to your brother; he must once more make you his heir, and when your position was secure—when we had once more ‘got round him,’ as we called it in the language of our merry ‘Quartier,’ I could become your wife. But how was this to be accomplished? You were both proud, neither would make the first advances. So my idle brain and loving heart formed a plan, that pleased my dear old student.” Fraulein Jenny smiled as she uttered the words, but the smile was a little too hard, and instantly vanished again. “One evening we read an advertisement stating that Count Leuthold Kopa, who was then in Strasbourg, wanted a governess for his little niece. Applicants were to address Madame Emilie Lessnie. I set out at once, introduced myself to Madame Lessnie, gave her my last gold piece and then my recommendations, and won the victory over my rivals. Two weeks after I entered the count’s family the housekeeper at Castle Kopa died. He delayed getting another till he went there. An upper servant could perform the duties in the meantime. But I had gained the count’s esteem and confidence, and I pretended to take the greatest pleasure in household duties. Countess Flora loved me as if I were not her governess; so, by

imperceptible degrees, I became all in all to the family. At Castle Kopa and in the city palace I directed the housekeeping. The count's brother, who had been a *mauvais sujet*, and left his home, was never mentioned, until a certain evening, when I made a remark whose effect I had been preparing by a thousand little intrigues, and which induced the old count to think of recalling you, for a reconciliation, since this course would be best for the honor of his name. You came, and resumed your old position. Count Leuthold, who only lives in ceremonies, took you as the Roman emperors adopted heirs. You once more shared the property, and were recognized as the future bearer of the name. And you and I seemed to be strangers to each other, for a long, long time must elapse ere you were securely fixed in your position, and I had obtained so strong a hold over Leuthold's heart that he could endure the thought of seeing me his relative. So we were strangers to each other, for if we betrayed our plans too soon all was lost. You would have been stigmatized as a cheat, who tried to deceive your brother through me. So we carried our caution so far that we never spoke to each other in private, not even when we believed ourselves entirely unobserved. Not even in the lonely park, the desolate fields, the empty corridors. But it was necessary to devise some expedient to enable

us to meet and talk to each other about our plans—our love.” Again Fraulein Jenny paused a second, and once more the same strange, hard, almost scornful smile flitted over her face. “So I hired this room, and, when it was necessary, wrote for you to come here. And on evenings when I was supposed to be ill or asleep, ‘Fraulein Lina’ saw her brother, who could not visit her at the factory because her employer would not allow it. Is this all true, Herr Count?”

“Yes,” said he; “I am here again, my position will soon be so assured that I can consider myself independent, and I owe it entirely to you. What would have become of me? I was frivolous—cared little for my life. Then you made a plan—thought of my future; I laughed at the design, for I believed it impossible that a woman could execute it; but you accomplished it. I thank you; I—” He could not take her hand as he said this, in a tone of feigned emotion.

She still sat quietly before him, wrapped in her shawl, but her eyes never wandered from his face. “Yes,” said she, “and you belong to me, do you not?”

He made no reply, but with a very pale face bent down and kissed her. Then he took her hand, or rather she grasped his, and, raising her head, gazed steadily into his eyes. “You belong to me; do not

forget that. Do not forget that I have given you all. My future, every hour of my past and present life, every thought of my soul, every pulsation of my heart, my hopes, my conscience, my pride—everything! For your sake I have learned to lie and dissemble—daily and hourly to play a farce. For your sake I have forgotten and lost all my peace, my innocence, my pride.”

There was a shade of rudeness in this grief, like some nameless anguish or dread. She still held his hand in a firm grasp, and her face was upturned to his; but no tears filled her eyes, no expression of her countenance betrayed pain or pleading.

“I wish it had never been,” he cried, with a sudden outburst of feeling. “I wish you had never done it, Jeanne, so help me God!”

“You wish that!” she exclaimed, suddenly starting from her chair, while the shawl fell on the floor. “And shall I tell you why? Because you love her.”

“Love!” he cried, his face crimsoning. “Love whom?”

“Her! Countess Marie!” She paused, gasping for breath, and her eyes pierced him like daggers; then the light suddenly died out of them. For he laughed, a short, careless laugh. “You are mad!” said he. And once more he stood by her side, threw his arm around her neck, kissed her with icy

lips, and said, in a quick, vehement, breathless tone, "You are mad, I tell you. Don't say that again. Whom should I love, if not you, Jeanne?"

Was he trying to conceal something, or did he wish to escape from his own thoughts?

The governess' eyes slowly fell, and she drew a long breath. "Forgive me," she said, in a low, anxious tone, as if chilled. "Perhaps I was mad. But I saw that you did not treat each other naturally. From the first moment you hated her, and she you. What but love could have actuated you both? And the French maid told me you offered yourself to her yesterday before the ball. These are all great lies, I know. But I was anxious, and could not help telling you. It is childish for me to be afraid. You belong to me forever."

She threw her arms around his neck, and laid her face against his cheek, as if fainting.

"See what a little goose you are," he said, in a hasty, impatient, haughty tone. "I—I belong to you. But don't tell me of it so often. It offends my pride to be looked upon as a piece of property, a slave, a chattel. I belong to you by the love that unites us, but by nothing else. Have I ever made any vow to you, pledged my honor, given myself to you by any of the oaths the usurers of love extort? I belong to you by love, yes; but by nothing else. And that needs no warning."

“By love!” she cried, scornfully, shaking back her fair hair as she stood trembling with excitement before the tall, handsome man. “Oh! what a poor security! And if, my old student, you some day cast away this love like a withered flower, I suppose I ought to quietly submit, go out of your way, tell over the rosary of my memories, and then die! Ha! ha! You belong to me! Not by the love that may die at any moment, nay, perhaps is already dead, but by my right! I have given you all, the hopes of my past and future, and in return I claim the happiness of serving you, of spending the rest of my life by your side, my beloved and hated Oswald! For I often hate you as fiercely, as fervently as I love you! During many silent nights I have prayed, plotted, worked for you, and ought you to drive me away from the door of your happiness with naught save a beautiful memory? Ask the furious tempest raging without: it will tell you my right to your joys and sorrows. I have laid my love, my youth, my whole future at your feet, like a sacrifice whose fragrant incense rose before you, and you have accepted the sacrifice. When I tore myself away from you, went among strangers, smiled, and flattered, and lied to them, while I thought of you with ardent love, and jealousy and longing; what days I spent during the cheerless autumn. You do not know how defenseless, how

poor, how weak we women are. We ask men for happiness, but only *one* man can give it to us. You are soon consoled—we never. You can forget; we cannot, even when we are faithless. A man's heart is soon satisfied, a woman gives comfort and reaps longing. Every woman who loves carries in her soul a store of misery, at the bare suspicion of which a man would despair and die, for the men we love have a cruel skill in wounding us. The day on which we first see the ruler of our hearts decides our whole future lives. And you are so handsome, so madly loved, and withal so calm. Men have no idea of real hatred or genuine love. You are pitiless to the unhappy, merciless to those who sin. You will never feel the madness of despair, but neither can you enjoy the bliss of a heaven upon earth. You have the red cheeks of health, like the coffins of the Egyptian mummies, which contain only dust. Oftentimes we do not know how to understand your dull, proud, imperious repose. But we love you, to shame, hatred, death! You have robbed me of my heart, called me your betrothed bride, suffered me to plot, strive, lie for you. You will say that all this was only a youthful, careless, passing fancy, or happiness that never lasts. It may be so. No law, no vow, no social obligations bind you to me. Only the honor of the heart! Do you understand the words, my old student?"

And the impulsive, tiny, elfin creature slowly loosened her arms and gazed at him with an expression of blended mischief, humility, affection, and menace. And he—slowly bent his face, which glowed like fire.

“Do you understand?” she repeated, in a tone of savage triumph. “The honor of the heart!”

He was still silent. Then she became childishly coaxing, laughed, and patted his cheeks.

“Yes,” he said, suddenly, in a harsh, deep, ringing voice, and it seemed as if he had suddenly grasped the iron chain of his past with an impatient hand. “Yes, I belong to you.”

She smiled again, then leaned her head on her folded arms and wept bitterly. She felt that he no longer loved her.

* * * * *

“So!” said Rose, as, long after midnight, she slowly went up the stairs of the Kopa palace. Hour after hour she had crouched close by the door of the governess’ room, in the gloomy corridor below, listening to the rushing rain, until Fraulein Jenny came home. And now she glided up the stairs, holding her skirts closely around her, that they might not rustle. “Ah! so you said you had a headache and went to bed early. And when it grew darker you took advantage of a moment when there was nobody on the stairs, and ran down the

steps out into the night. So ! In an old dark dress ! Of course you had an appointment. But it certainly wasn't with a gentleman, or you would not have worn that dress. The next time, Fraulein Jenny, I'll manage to follow you. Yes, it's very fine. *Et je vous souhaite la bonne nuit, mademoiselle, et que le diable vous emportelà."*

* * * * *

And mademoiselle, drawing a long breath, quietly laid herself down to rest.



THEN SHE FELL AT THE COUNTESS' FEET.—See Page 152.



CHAPTER XIII.

The rain fell monotonously from the sky, and the gray light struggled through heavy clouds. But clear, bright weather, like that of early spring, followed these dreary days. All nature seemed to utter a sigh of relief. In the country the meadows and trees looked green once more, and the horses belonging to the count's stud were allowed to run at large in the pastures. The grooms sat in front of the stable doors, shouting merrily to the peasant lasses, and the smoke of the locomotives on the railroad was the only cloud in the blue sky. Count Leuthold stood at the window of his city palace, gazing at the bright heavens.

“It is like a spring day; the birds are singing; it would be pleasant to spend a few days at Castle Kopa, don't you think so? It is really just like spring.”

It was, indeed, like spring. On the steps of a house opposite to the Kopa palace, a vagrant sat

sunning himself. It was a lonely, quiet avenue, a secluded aristocratic quarter, where the bustle of the other streets sounded like a faint echo.

The servants were informed of the plan, and Count Leuthold asked his brother whether he thought it would be possible to make some improvements in the domestic offices during the few days of their absence.

Countess Marie, with Rose's assistance, packed a few articles of clothing in a valise ; little Flora put up various bundles of dolls, which she always opened again and decided not to take with her, and Fraulein Jenny put on a walking dress to do some shopping. There are always purchases to be made when people leave a city for five or six days. And Fraulein Jenny was in a hurry ; she went on foot. She was only going to a dressmaker's in the next street.

She came out of the door, passed down the steps in the bright autumn sunlight, and walked along the aristocratic street to a more bustling quarter. The man who was sunning himself opposite, now rose with a yawn, and in his long coat and battered hat, the remnants of a handsome livery, slunk after the lady.

Fraulein Jenny, attired in a short gray walking dress, with gray parasol in her hand, came out of the dressmaker's and entered the crowded streets

again, where she received a bow from some one in the throng. When any one bows to a lady she usually looks at the person to suit the response to his station in society. But Fraulein Jenny made no response at all. She might as well have been saluted by Medusa's head and thus turned to stone. Her beautiful eyes looked unnaturally large, and her lips were firmly compressed. The man bowed again, bowed with the smiling, confident, terribly familiar expression which roughly tears us from the present with the rude, dirty hand of a long-buried past. And now Fraulein Jenny, smiling brightly, answered the salute. The man moved, as if to approach her, but she looked steadily at him, and he drew back. She did not return to the count's palace, but went on down the street, till she reached a large restaurant, which she entered, taking her seat at a small marble table at the farthest corner. Several persons looked after her, and then fixed their eyes on their newspapers again.

A waiter dressed in a white apron and greasy black coat, followed her, and, putting his hand on the little marble table, waited for her order.

She asked for something, which, with a glass of water, was soon set before her.

Just at that moment a shabby looking fellow, in a battered old hat, entered the restaurant. He had a sharp, keen face, and looked eagerly around. The

waiter went up to him, and in a harsh, doubtful tone, asked what he wanted? The man replied in French, that he was looking for some one. French always exerts a strange influence over Germans, and the waiter drew back as if in the presence of a duke. The man walked on to the marble table where the lady sat, removed his hat, and, holding it in his hand, smiled and murmured a few words.

“Good morning,” said Fraulein Jenny, in French. “I recognized you instantly. Let me order something for you.”

The Frenchman hung his hat on the wall, called the waiter, asked for absinthe, and then sat down in the velvet chair opposite Fraulein Jenny, rested one elbow on the table, and said, in the courteous phraseology of his native language :

“Oh! I am delighted to see you again, mademoiselle. I was so astonished. *Mon Dieu!* I lodge in a house, and in an adjoining room—when was it?—oh! day before yesterday!—heard voices I knew. So I looked through a crack in the door, for it is a very dilapidated house, mademoiselle, and saw—whom? Mademoiselle Jeanne and Monsieur Oswald de Paris. From the Rue de Rempart. How strange it was!”

Fraulein Jenny laughed heartily, then paused suddenly, wearily averted her face, and murmured a few polite words. “Yes, it was a fortunate meet-

ing. So you are living in this city, Monsieur Jacques?"

"Yes," he answered hoarsely. "And I suppose Mademoiselle is Madame Oswald?"

Fraulein Jenny paused for the hundredth part of a second, and gazed through the window into the crowded street.

"Yes," she answered, in a quick, pleasant tone.

"Oh! but the porter told me Fraulein Jenny was the governess, and Monsieur Oswald the brother of Monseigneur, the owner of the house," murmured Jacques, as he swallowed his absinthe, without adding a drop of water.

For a moment Fraulein Jenny turned deadly pale. She looked so small, so fragile, so slight, so powerless, as she sat at the little marble table; but Jacques, with a gloomy expression, muttered: "If she could trample me under her feet."

"Oh! you are still the same old spy, Jacques Leroux!" said Fraulein Jenny, holding out her delicate gloved hand to her companion. "What gay times we used to have in the Rue du Rempart, didn't we?"

"Yes, but it's very lively here, too; only things don't go very well with me," he answered; "I never have any money. You have hired the room next mine, Fraulein Jenny. But you so seldom come there. Is Count Leuthold Kopa, in whose family

you are governess, very rich, Mademoiselle? And charitable? Perhaps I might induce him to give me some help. But you must first say a good word for me. You know, Mademoiselle Jeanne, old friends ought to help each other."

Fraulein Jenny looked very grave. "Listen to me, Jacques," said she. "Count Leuthold Kopa is a miser. I will provide for your support." And she drew out her purse, took from it one small bank-note, and pushed it eagerly across the table. "When I receive my next quarter's salary, I'll come and see you."

'Oh! you are a thousand times too kind, mademoiselle!" said the man. "I thank you. But don't forget your old acquaintance, or I shall have to seek you out, you know. So he is avaricious. How stupid that is in a brother of Monsieur Oswald, isn't it? What happy days those were in the Rue du Rempart. I was an idle student, and lived on the ground floor, and you lived on the second story, and were such a merry *grisette*. And Monsieur Oswald was your betrothed husband. And now he proves to be the brother of this avaricious old count, and lives in the castle with you. It's a perfect romance."

Fraulein Jenny rose, paid her bill, and left the restaurant. Monsieur Jacques bowed politely to the waiter, and followed her with a drooping head.

The crowd before the door was very great. Fraulein Jenny paused a moment, held her parasol before her eyes, and arranged her walking dress. She looked very beautiful.

“And you?” said she, glancing at the Frenchman; “what are you doing in this city? Are you studying?”

He made a graceful bow. “I do everything. I talk, I lounge about, I—am silent, I dance, and would even become your enemy, Mademoiselle, if it were worth while—for it would be a very hard task.” He rattled on with the volubility of a true Gascon. But Fraulein Jenny looked at him gravely. “I would become your servant—for anything. Perhaps you have somebody to murder?” He laughed.

Fraulein Jenny gazed at him with a strange, searching look, then nodded haughtily, and disappeared in the crowd.

“Why did she look at me so?” thought the *ex-valet*, as he weighed the purse.



CHAPTER XIV.

The sun had tried to give the village, the fields, the park, and Castle Kopa itself a spring-like aspect, and for this purpose lent the yellow foliage a rosy hue and the sky a warm light. In the midst of the lovely weather, a shower of rain had drenched the trees and bushes, thus completing the illusion that summer had returned ; yet Count Leuthold almost regretted that he had come to the country. He had found nothing to improve, and thought of returning to the city again. Meantime, in his dignified but restless manner, he had driven over to a neighboring castle, with Countess Flora and his *valet*, to wander about the grounds, chat a little with the four countesses, listen to a piece of music by Kontski, play a game of casino, and return home by moonlight.

Countess Marie was beginning to feel a cheerless void in her own heart and her new life. When she lived with her mother at home she had been obliged to “work ;” to perform the various little tasks

which fill up the time. She had had her walks with her mother and an old priest, who came every evening, and a thousand little girlish occupations. Here, at her Uncle Leuthold's, she had nothing to do, nothing to say, nothing to think, nothing to hope. It was a cheerless, empty life of luxury, for which it was needful that one should be educated. Her rooms at Castle Kopa and in the city palace were really prison cells, in which *ennui* held her bound. She had nothing to do, was not permitted to do anything—and her simple fancy-work had lost all charm for her.

But the castle garden was still beautiful, and the air to-day as warm as spring. She would go down. But she had a strange feeling when she was in the park alone. She hated Count Oswald, and Count Oswald also liked to walk in the park. Now, however, she had sat for half an hour at her window, looking over the avenues, without even catching a glimpse of him. He did not drive out with Count Leuthold and Flora, but possibly had shouldered his gun and gone to shoot partridges. So Countess Marie, in her Havana brown dress, went down the corridor, pausing at one window after another, and thinking how brightly the sun was setting, and then glided down the staircase and entered the long, wide avenue of poplars, whose leaves fluttered

slowly from the trees, or lay in heaps on the ground.

But Countess Marie was not at ease amid all this beauty. She did not feel as happy and light-hearted as of old. During the last few months everything had seemed to grow grander and colder. She tried to hum, and her voice died away. It was strange. The ruddy evening light, which streamed into the corridor, seemed as if it were a servant of Count Oswald, who always stood before her as her patron. He had often come up the stairs she was descending. He might be somewhere in the park, might be wandering over the fields. Oh! Countess Marie undoubtedly hated him very bitterly, for she saw and thought of him everywhere; he made everything seem strange, unfriendly, hostile. And when she looked up, there he stood! Yes. He was standing in the little, round, open wooden temple, that looked like a huge mushroom, gazing at her, and pulling his moustache. As usual, he leaned idly against one of the wooden columns; no, not as usual. He was graver, his face wore a different expression; he bowed in silence, and did not even smile.

Countess Marie had paused before a small pool of water, that separated her from the temple and was impassible. Now she turned to go back, but

Oswald said: "The puddle is not much for a man, cousin. Wait."

She waited, gazing down into the dirty water. He stepped forward, raised her in his arms like a child and lifted her from the ground.

She tried to say something, but only stammered "Cousin," and then threw her arm around his neck and allowed him to carry her into the temple, where he put her down.

"There," said he, and then paused again. "You ventured to come out," he added.

"I did not think it was so wet," she said, shaking her dress. "There is a cold wind blowing, too. But is the western sky usually so deep a crimson at sunset?"

"Yes, it is like a smiling farewell from autumn, on whose cheek a tear still glitters. Enjoy the beauty, Marie; I will go into the fields," said Count Oswald, gently.

She looked earnestly at him. "And why?" she asked, in a tremulous voice. She felt so sorry for him at that moment. She had been foolish to hate him so bitterly, and show this hatred so plainly. She had often reproached herself for it of late. And yet, only two minutes before, she had been foolish enough to wish to reject his aid. She would be kind and cordial to him; cordial as beseemed relatives who had never injured each other and

wished each other no harm. He had spoken so gently and wanted to leave her. So she asked, with a smile, "Why?" Her smiles were so rare, that, when they did come, they transfigured her whole face.

"Because you do not like my society, cousin," he answered, quietly.

"Oh! that is only in your imagination, Oswald," she said, hastily. She had been unwarrantably harsh for a long time, and wanted to put an end to this state of affairs; but it was a difficult task. "I don't understand how to show my feelings, and am often misunderstood. Forgive me if I have treated you unkindly." And she held out her hand, with a frank, honest glance. She had often intended to say this, and been irritated to defiance again as soon as he addressed her in his careless, frivolous fashion. To-day, however, he was so sad, so gentle, that all her hatred melted like snow.

He cast a startled almost timid glance at her, and fairly gasped for breath. He heard a voice that sounded very different from her usual tone, and saw her, looking more beautiful than ever, smiling, smiling at him. "Oh!" said he to himself, "is this a dream?" Then his heart, which had swelled with joy, suddenly contracted with a vague terror. "You are in a very cordial mood to-day, cousin!" said he, trying to smile.

She turned away. "Ah! you are unkind; can you not forgive?" she asked, pouting.

His face suddenly altered strangely. The darkness had increased; only the topmost summits of the trees still glowed with a crimson light, and the park had grown damp and chilly. Everything around the little temple was so still and silent that he could almost hear his own thoughts, and they suddenly confused him. "Oh! Cousin Marie," he cried, "what does this mean? You no longer hate me. Oh! God, do not speak so; treat me as you have always done, I implore you; be harsh, avoid me, I implore you; do you hear?"

She gazed at him in terror. Had he gone mad? But no madness looked forth from his eyes; only a strange despair, a dread of this new happiness. "I implore you," he repeated. "For, if you are kind, what will happen? Do you not know that I love you? Oh! do not interrupt me; I must tell you, that you may avoid, shun me. Yes, I love you, you alone, Marie; deeply, unutterably. It is a terrible, unwarrantable thing. For my love, Marie, offered to a girl like you, is an insult, a disgrace. I am not good, not free. I wear shameful fetters, and may not love; if I do, it is blasphemy—a sin against the woman I love, and a dishonor to my past. Ah! do not be frightened, do not be angry with me. I must tell you this; I am in a delirium. Why did you

“speak to me so kindly, smile upon me, give me your hand ; now, now, when I needed your hatred, your scorn, your pride, that I might remain strong and defiant. Your kindness has made me weak, powerless, timid. I love you ; yes, yes. Ah ! now you will no longer be friendly, for you do not love me. And that is well, that is fortunate, for I am not worthy of being loved. I could never give you happiness, my little proud darling ; only misery and conflict. How beautiful, how good you are, Marie, and how I love you ! There, now you know, you must hate me. Farewell, farewell, Marie. Do not be angry—my heart aches so. Farewell !”

He disappeared in the gathering dusk of the gloomy park. Countess Marie stood leaning against one of the columns of the temple, gazing after him ; the crimson light varnished from the tree-tops ; the gray pools seemed to form the whole atmosphere. “Oh !” she thought, gasping for breath, “I have been dreaming.”

* * * * *

“The whole sky already looks so dark ; only far down near the horizon is a strip of red, as red as fire,” said Mademoiselle Rose, as if to herself. Then she looked at Fraulein Jenny, who was standing on the terrace, plucking some withered leaves from a plant that grew in a stone urn. “Oh ! Fraulein

Jenny," said she, "would you like to see something beautiful?"

"What is it?" asked Fraulein Jenny, looking up.

"Make haste and go up stairs, Fraulein," said Rose, in her sweetest French. "Then open the door that leads into the dining-hall."

"And then?"

"Then go through the dining-hall and open the door that leads into the coffee-room."

"And then?"

"Then go to the window."

"And there?"

"There you will see."



CHAPTER XV.

The window of the coffee-room overlooked the little temple. Countess Marie stood leaning, almost clinging to one of the pillars, as if shrinking from Count Oswald, who, with clasped hands, was kneeling at her feet.

Fraulein Jenny also ventured out into the wet park, recklessly dragging her dress through the puddles.

* * * * *

A strange feeling urged her on, a feeling like madness, or some vague dream. She could not think soberly; there was a chaos of anger, fear, and passion in her brain, and ere this chaos had left her mind clear, she stood before Countess Marie.

The latter had raised her dress, and was in the act of springing across the wide puddle before the wooden temple, when the governess suddenly appeared. Fraulein Jenny had no cloak, her skirts were draggled with water, and her hair tossed by the wind.

This was the guise in which the little, pale, elf-like creature stood before her.

"Ah! I am glad you have come," said Countess Marie, holding out her hand. "How fortunate. You will help me over this puddle, won't you?"

But Fraulein Jenny, instead of taking her hand, walked straight through the pool to the young girl's side. The trees around were already shrouded by damp, gloomy shadows, and the last pale gray light vanished from the sky. A chilly wind made the leaves rustle in the darkness, and the two girls saw only the outlines of each other's figures.

"One moment!" said Fraulein Jenny, in a harsh, dissonant, unnatural tone, a tone Countess Marie had never before heard from her lips. "One moment, Countess. Be kind enough to give me two words."

Countess Marie looked at her in surprise. "Two words. Oh! yes; but here? Would it not be better for us to go to the castle, Fraulein?"

"Two words—here. It would not be better to go to the castle," repeated Fraulein Jenny, as if she were saying the words by rote, or wanted to remember something. Brain and heart were still confused by the wild chaos of her thoughts.

A sudden fear seized upon the young countess. She was scarcely conscious of Fraulein Jenny's object, but it seemed as if what she was about to hear

had some connection with what she had already heard. She involuntarily drew back from the fair-haired governess, for it seemed as if she were near some sharp weapon, whose blade glittered in the darkness.

“But—is—is it not cold here?” she asked, trying to speak in her usual quiet tone, though it was perhaps a shade more haughty.

“No,” said Fraulein Jenny, and it seemed as if the two women had exchanged characters. “Be kind enough, Countess, to answer my question here. Is Count Oswald your lover?”

The question sounded as if it were uttered by a mad woman. Countess Marie did not answer immediately.

Her astonishment had been transformed to indignation. She was silent.

“Oh! she does not reply,” continued Fraulein Jenny, like a bodiless voice speaking in the darkness. “But you must answer me, Countess. Does what I say seem strange? Yes, you are angry, are you not? But do not be so. I know that Count Oswald is—can be nothing to you. Do I not know that I only ask for my own peace of mind? My heart is almost bursting, Countess. Do you know that Count Oswald is my betrothed husband? Ah! now I have told you the secret which I would not have allowed a thousand tortures to force from me,

and which no one must know. Do you see how great my anxiety and despair must be? But consider, Rose told me that Oswald had made a declaration of love to you—in the corridor! Is that probable? So soon after you first met. I knew she was lying. She hates me, and wants to make me angry. I know that, but when we are jealous, we don't listen to reason. And so many other things happened—and now, just now, I saw him kneeling before you. It was only an accident; I only imagined it, for it was already dusk. Isn't that so? But I thought I should go mad, Countess. I am ill. Forgive me, and do not betray us or we are lost. Perhaps Oswald loves you. You are so beautiful, and, oh! God, men are so inconstant. But you will always hate him, and that is well. You see he belongs to me, Countess." Fraulein Jenny paused.

"Your betrothed husband?" repeated the Countess Marie in a trembling voice; an icy chill ran through her limbs and she leaned against one of the columns of the temple.

"Yes, he has been betrothed to me for a long time, two or three years, and I shall be his wife. But you came, and you were so beautiful, and you did not like him, nor he you, and that made me anxious, and then all this followed. When I did not know what to do, I said to myself, 'I will ask the Countess; she will laugh, and my mind will be at rest for-

ever!" You *are* laughing, are you not? Jealousy is such a strange feeling, but it makes one giddy—I—I have been scarcely able to breathe for the last fifteen minutes. My God, what more am I to say to you? I had so many things, and now I only know that you will speak one kind word. If I look at you, follow you in future, you will only think, 'She is jealous again, poor thing.' And you will soothe my fears, Countess. Ah! I am sure you will. I have played a part so long for his sake. We have loved each other so fondly. You have never loved. How should you? You are so young, so beautiful, so proud; but if we poor girls, who stand alone in the world, love a man once, it is forever. We must do so that we may not lose all courage; Count Oswald is my future, my whole future. Some day God will bless you, and you will be happy, Countess—but you have not yet told me that I am foolish, that you forgive me, that you—that you do not love Oswald!—say so now!" Fraulein Jenny paused a moment, and gazed intently at the dark, motionless figure before her, while no sound was heard save the rustling of the wet leaves. Then she suddenly drew herself up and said, in a hoarse, shrill tone: "What have you to do with him, Countess?"

Countess Marie drew a long breath, and for the first time in her life a fierce conflict was raging in her proud, girlish heart. The predominant feelings

were indignation and anger—anger against the woman before her, who had the right to love him, Count Oswald, her cousin. She did not know why she was so angry, or whether it was not more sorrow than indignation. Each word the governess uttered caused her bitter pain, as if it tore whole handfuls of budding spring blossoms from her heart, pitilessly, unsparingly. Her proud spirit rebelled. The Countess Marie was a noble girl, but no spark of compassion now glowed in her heart. She did not hear the anguish, only the presumptuous words: “He is my betrothed husband.”

“How can you venture to speak to me so, Fraulein Jenny Lorm?” she said, breathless with indignation. “You forget yourself.”

“Oh, God, what have I done? Don’t you see I am in a fever of anxiety, that I am dying, that you must sooth me for the dear God’s sake! Tell me that you have no understanding with Oswald.”

“I don’t understand you, I do not know what you want. You are dreaming or mad—”

“Oh! she will not answer,” gasped the governess, fairly beside herself with rage, as she seized the young girl’s hand. “So it is true! So it is true!” she cried, in an undertone, with a fierce, terrible voice. “You love each other! Confess it.”

“Am I obliged to give you an account of my actions?”

“Yes, you are,” cried the governess, eagerly, drawing her fragile little figure up to its full height, and holding the struggling girl firmly by the arm. “So you did not hear that he belongs to me, that I have a right to him, and that every woman who comes in my way, is a—oh! you see I do not know what I am saying—but why did you urge me so far! I must say, once for all, what has so long been seething within me. What do I care for you all! There is a red mist before my eyes. There you stand talking about dignity, and whether you are accountable to me? Yes, for you are a great lady! To be sure. And you are virtuous, and haughty, and beautiful, and pure as heaven itself! And we—we are servants. Ever since we can remember we have been driven about from house to house among strangers: no mother has fondled us, no one has made the way soft and smooth to our feet. We met with naught save toil, insult, contempt, which we were expected to repay with ready service, smiles, and gentleness.

“And then people say, ‘They are only servants! What are they worth? They run after a husband, a dowry, flirt with our brothers, the counts, and try to force themselves upon us. But often, countess, often our love is sincere, and we choose for the lord of our hearts not the man of rank and wealth, but the poorest, the most forsaken, that we may be poor

with him, comfort and help him. So I loved Oswald, when he was poor, disinherited, deserted, and devoted my whole life to the task of serving him, making him happy, and removing every stone from his path. Imitate us in this for once, ladies! Then a beautiful aristocratic lady comes, coquets with the man who belongs to me, wins him by her innocent, artless ways, and—it is simply infamous! Do you hear? Oh! you can drive me away from here, of course—yet no, you cannot; for Oswald must follow me—he belongs to me, do you hear? To me! to me! You can only drive me away by shaking the house, as it now stands, to its foundations; and if you do that, any one can point at you and say: ‘Look at that woman; she could not get rid of her rival except by removing her from her path! She had no beauty, no love, to win the victory, so used force.’ Ha! ha! You see that you are not yet sole mistress here, countess.”

“My rival!” repeated Countess Marie, in an angry, scornful, yet tremulous tone.

“Yes, I said so, and you are, or you would have answered me, cheered me, and all would have been well. Oswald loves you, and you him! I knew it when I came here, but I was weak and wanted to be comforted. Forget the dream, I tell you, he belongs to me!”

“To you!” cried Countess Marie, and her pride,

her secret love, and bitter pain all found utterance in the words. "And since when has a man belonged to a woman against his will? Do you believe Count Oswald loves you? Do you think he will ever love a woman who claims his heart as a piece of property she could purchase? Sacrifice, devotion! They make the giver happier than the receiver. Who thinks of demanding payment for joy? I think, even if we serve a man all our lives, we have no right to his love, and the service renders us still more happy than it does him. Could we live without him? Oh! yes, I know now what it is to love. Yours is only selfishness, you wicked woman! And if I loved him, I would do it to save him—from you."

"Do you love him?"

"And if I did?"

This one hour had transformed Countess Marie into a woman. In the grief and horror inspired by the governess' words, "He belongs to me," she had gained a knowledge of herself and the love she had so long unconsciously concealed in her heart.

Fraulein Jenny trembled from head to foot. Her fingers twitched with a murderous desire, then she fell at the young countess' feet, as if utterly crushed. "Oh! it is not possible that you can be so wicked, so heartless? Do you not hear? You are still so young! I have confessed all, and

have no love but him. You will often be loved. You are just entering life. But I? From whom could I ask love if not from him? You have never wept for him. You don't know what it is. And perhaps he does not love you ; it was only a fancy—such as he felt for me. That is the way with men. Leave me! Oh, God! oh, God! don't you see that I no longer know what I am doing—that I might do you some harm? Oh!"

Countess Marie hastily burst away, and, with a low cry, ran out into the darkness and fled toward the castle.

Fraulein Jenny tottered up and clung to a pillar, where she stood as if lifeless, while the damp, chill night air blew over her. She shed no tears, but often uttered a low moan, and, after a long, long time the thought of her first meeting with Oswald recurred to her mind. It was on Sunday, and she had worn a blue veil that floated in the summer breeze.



CHAPTER XVI.

The little fair-haired factory girl must have had numerous holidays at this time, for one Sunday she even came to her room before dark. In the daytime Herr Ilde's house was always remarkably quiet and lonely. All his lodgers seemed to sleep like owls, and on Sunday even the shop was closed like a coffin. Herr Idle spent that day in solitude, perhaps even in prayer. These prayers, however, always seemed to be accompanied by sacrifices, for the little chimney which projected from the back shop sent forth a thick, black column of smoke. If Herr Ilde did not offer sacrifices, perhaps he was an alchemist.

To-day the sun cast its changeful rays full into the most secluded, darkest dens in the house.

Fraulein Lina was no better dressed than usual; her attire was as old, as shabby, as dark as ever, but when she removed her hat her hair glittered like gold. She approached the locked door that

opened into the next room, and knocked. "Are you there?" she asked. "Answer, Jacques! I know you want to play the spy! Come!" She shook the handle.

A low grumble was heard at the other door, which now sprang open of its own accord, revealing Monsieur Jacques, who stood on the threshold with an air of mingled embarrassment and effrontery. She handed him a packet of money. "There; you need not listen when I pay you, *animal!*"

He took the money, muttered a few meaningless words in French, and walked out of the room, whistling. Fraulein Jenny left the door open, and drew from her pocket a scrap of paper with a few words scrawled upon it, saying, "He wants to see me; what can it mean!"

She loved Count Oswald so fondly that she often hoped he would throw his arm around her and say, "Jeanne, all sorrow is over; happiness has come."

At other times she hated him so bitterly that she thought, "He has betrayed, abandoned me, and I will crush him like a worm."

This time he had requested an interview, and she was waiting for him. She expected happiness or treachery. Pale and very calm, she leaned against the window of the quiet, sunny room.

Count Oswald came. He wore his ordinary dress, for the costume of a fashionable man does

not attract so much attention in an out-of-the-way quarter as that of an elegant woman. He looked grave, pale, and remarkably handsome.

Fraulein Jenny, with her gleaming hair, which curled in little feathery rings, smilingly approached and took his hand.

"You have something to tell me, Oswald, on this lovely day. Oh! if we could only take an excursion, as we used to do in Paris, to Romainville, or Auteuil, or anywhere. How beautiful the weather has been ever since we returned to the city. Have you anything pleasant to say to me, Bibi?"

He let his hands remain in hers, and bent toward her. At that moment she loved him inexpressibly; never had she thought him so handsome.

"Let me go away, Jeanne," said he. "Only for a month—a fortnight. I cannot endure it here." He paused.

There were many changing emotions in her mind as she gazed at him, still with a smile, though it was somewhat forced. She seemed to be searching his very soul. But she only said, gently, "You want to go away. Why? Where?"

The questions were perfectly simple and natural, yet he could not answer immediately.

"Where?" he repeated. "Anywhere;" and then relapsed into silence, and gazed steadily into vacancy.

“And why?” she asked again.

“Why? How childish you are! I need change of air. It is often suffocating to men to live among women. Don’t you understand that? *Mon Dieu!* I belong to you; we shall be happy. I know all you want to say; but I—I can’t endure it here. I’m not a slave or a child.” His voice grew louder. “I have no peace. I must get a breath of the sea air. I only wanted to tell you that I was going to take a little journey. You needn’t wonder and ask questions about it.”

His excitement disappeared, and he smiled his old smile.

Fraulein Jenny patted his hand. “I understand you. Yes, you need the change. You men have not the patience of women. And then—then perhaps you have had a little flirtation with Countess Marie, and without any serious intentions, made the poor thing love you, and now want to be on less familiar terms by going away. Is it so? Then I thank you.”

He looked at her with the beautiful eyes that always made her heart swell. “A flirtation!”

“Yes. Don’t be troubled. She told me so herself. And you want to go away for a time. Very well! I will be here at my post. It is better so. I really don’t believe you love her, and are trying to forget her; but our position here is so unbearable,

that it will be best to make a change for a few weeks. We can't tell even how much one week may accomplish." She paused, and looked tenderly at him.

"Yes," he said; "how kind and sensible you are, Jeanne."

She stooped and kissed his hand. "Yes, only be good and contented. Enjoy your journey, and believe that all will yet be well."

At this moment she was a true woman, full of love, gentleness, humility, and trust, and he thought, mournfully, "Why can I no longer love her?" Poor girl! He had just found his true love.

She still talked on, standing at the window in the bright sunlight. Then they took leave of each other, but did not leave the house together. Count Oswald went first, and Fraulein Jenny waited. As she leaned against the window in dull, quiet submission, she struggled wearily with a thought that rose in her heart: "He is going! But alone? Perhaps with her!" Her face crimsoned. "Perhaps it is all treachery and falsehood!"

She turned, turned away from the sunlight toward the dusky interior of the room with a face that was not unfamiliar to these old walls. If he has deceived her, if he loves Countess Marie, he has no mercy to expect from her.

She might now leave the room and the house,

but this sudden, monstrous, terrible idea chained her to the spot.

She waited. For what? The door leading into the next room stood open.

Often joyous groups of workmen, or servant girls with their lovers emerged from the dirty side alleys into the wider streets, but the person she eagerly expected did not appear. At last she hastily put on her hat and threw her shawl around her shoulders. "Bah!" she exclaimed, glancing toward the next room, and then left the house without waiting for the French adventurer. But her face wore the same expression which had made the latter mutter, "Why did she look at me so strangely?"



CHAPTER XVII.

It is not so easy a matter for a Count Oswald to journey into the world. He must have his trunks packed, say to his brother, "I am going to travel—for a few weeks. To Florence, or somewhere;" and he must give some reason. Count Leuthold replied, "Ah! but you can't go for a week; there is to be a hunt."

"But—"

"Oh! you have no business at Florence. Do you mean to leave me to do the honors of the hunt alone?"

But Count Oswald was resolute, and one day bade adieu to the different members of the family. He entered Countess Marie's *boudoir*.

She had been sitting at a work-table, but a book was lying among the embroidery. The room was flooded with a cool, clear light. When Count Oswald entered, the young girl hastily rose and advanced two or three steps toward him. "Oh!

here you are at last!" she cried. "I have been expecting you, Oswald. Yesterday and the day before."

"Did you know I was going away?" said he.

"I heard so. Why are you going, and where?" The quiet, proud girl seemed wholly changed. Her voice again mirrored her soul, and this soul seemed to embrace Oswald like a loving, anxious arm.

"I am going to Italy, as soon as the hunt at Castle Kopa is over; we shall go there day after to-morrow, and I shall set out on my journey three or four days later. But I wanted to bid you farewell, here in the privacy of home; for at Castle Kopa, as lady of the house, your attention will be claimed by the guests."

"You are really going? And why?"

He was silent. She was now seated on the sofa, and he in an arm-chair beside it. The room was very bright. Marie wore a light silk dress, and her hair was somewhat disordered.

"Yes," she repeated, "why? Have you any business? does anything call you there?"

"No," he said, at last, with a certain emphasis. "Something drives me away."

"Ah!" she replied. "Can you tell what it is? Have I anything?—"

She was entirely unlike her usual self. All her

composure and quiet reserve had been transformed into a strange resolution. She looked brighter than in former days, but the bright glance was accompanied by a sort of soft shadow, like a cloud over the sun, and she seemed all the more beautiful.

Ever since her conversation with the governess, Countess Marie had known that she loved Oswald. She loved him, and was aware that Jenny was struggling and weeping for him, that she intended to tear him from her, and the fear of losing him made her feel the power and reality of the strongest of all passions. The pride of her race strengthened her heart to form a noble resolution.

If the honor of a man's heart consists in making her whom he loves happy, the honor of a woman's consist in being loved by the man she can render happy.

Ever since the scene with Fraulein Jenny, Count Oswald had been all in all to Countess Marie. She had recognized her future, her happiness, and her proper course; she had been awakened to her mission; to love and give happiness.

"Am I the cause?" she asked.

"Yes," said Count Oswald.

"You are going away because you love me?" Her smile was like sunlight.

"Yes," replied Count Oswald, breathlessly, with a fierce pang at his heart.

"Only for that?" she said, smiling, while her heart seemed to speak from the laughing lips. Then a blush slowly crimsoned her cheek, and her eyes drooped.

The room in which they sat was a very beautiful one, with yellow tapestry and sea-green furniture. Out of doors, the reddish light of autumn fell upon the courtyard, where some nut trees stood; the stamping of a horse sometimes echoed from the stable; everything else was still. "Only for that?" she had said. There was a world of meaning in the words. Count Oswald dared not think what they might imply. His heart began to beat more quickly and he forced himself to say, in a thick, hurried tone, "Yes. Because I love you, cousin, and no longer belong to myself, but to my betrothed bride."

"A betrothed bride!"

"Yes, a betrothed bride, who has a right to me. You know this?"

"I know all."

It is a moment when he is not surprised, asks no questions. There are times when lovers are omniscient.

"All?" he repeated. "No. Perhaps you know that I was a careless officer. What was my name to me? A burden. Wealth? An evil. Honor? To deceive no one. Life? To be gay—gay in any

way. We all lead such lives. Then I ran in debt, pledged wealth, name, and duty, and one day stood alone in the world. Nothing remained except cheerful spirits—and they were to be found in Paris. And in the midst of that wild life I found love, the love of Jeanne Lorm. Do you know that? Yes, I see you do. Very well. We were betrothed to each other. She wished, in woman's fashion, to be happy as my wife, even though I was a beggar, for she really loved me. I laughed at the idea, and replied: 'That would be utter misery, child, and I could not endure it.' Then she formed a plan. She came here and played a very clever part, which effected a reconciliation between me and my brother. After a few months she had so far won the latter's heart that she could venture to hope that nothing would stand in the way of our 'happiness.' Then you came, cousin. What shall I say to you? I begin to see that I had never loved before."

Fraulein Jenny! Where was she when Count Oswald uttered these words? If she had heard them, they would have been her death. A woman's death is not like a man's; her heart always dies first. A woman's body is only a husk; the slave, or the temple, or the tyrant of her heart—never herself. *Ave femina.*

"That I had never loved," Count Oswald con-

tinued. "Then I realized that I loved you, my proud, defiant darling, and I told you so. But Jeanne saw this, too, came to me and said, "You belong to me!" "

Countess Marie was silent. She only smiled.

"She said, 'You belong to me!' And added: 'Do you know the honor of the heart?' Then I resolved to fly, to fly from you, but—from her also. I cannot love her, even if all my ancestors stood before me ready to destroy my escutcheon. I cannot! I will go away. I shall not be happy, but neither can I become utterly miserable for the sake of an hour of gayety, already atoned for by months of constraint. I have never loved her; I did not know what the feeling was. A fiery atmosphere always surrounded us. I should murder her if I remained here. And now farewell, cousin."

He tried to rise—she knew all. But her hand rested on his arm and gently detained him. "You will come back again?" she said, in a low, breathless tone. He gazed at her long and earnestly; a livid pallor overspread his handsome face.

"Never!" said he.

"Come back to her, I mean."

"Never!"

She threw her arm around his neck like a child. "Then take me with you, Cousin Oswald."

He gazed at her like a madman.

"Yes, for I love you, Oswald. I have felt it from the first moment; dreaded it, and tried to shrink from you. But now——"

"Marie!"

"Yes. And the honor of your heart has nothing to say against it. I have an honor, too! I am a woman, I love you, we are both young and free. I would gladly be yours forever. My honor consists in not letting you fall into the power of a person who would make you unhappy. For I love you, and you return my love. If you wanted to keep Jeanne and make her happy, ought I to say a word against it? It would be horrible. But you wish to fly from her and me also. She will be miserable, and——"

"And you—you, too, Marie?"

She bent her head, and the next instant was clasped in his arms.

"But, if I leave this place forever, I shall be poor. Poverty, Marie——"

She smiled. "I am accustomed to it."

"You only pity me, do you not?" he asked, faintly, like a man who had suddenly been borne on radiant clouds into a Paradise.

"No, Oswald, God forgive me, I have loved you from the first hour."

* * * * *

Love, even in its greatest caution, is always blind.

To conceal or be false to a real affection is as hard a task as to weave intrigues in heaven. It is an impossibility. Only calculating, selfish love deceives and is deceived.

Count Oswald and Countess Marie were as quiet, as prudent as possible. Count Oswald continued his preparation for his journey, which he had deferred until after the hunting party.

The leaves fluttered silently from the trees, under the autumn breeze that blew from a cloudy sky; the late flowers showed their dull hues; everything wore its usual aspect. Count Leuthold was important, Count Oswald quiet, pleasant, and smiling; Countess Marie unchanged; yet one day Fraulein Jenny suddenly said to herself, "Oswald is going away—from her whom he had begun to love, and he is happy."

For that day he had laughed, laughed at a peasant child who had met him at the garden gate and made him some droll, childish answer. Really laughed, and anything can be feigned more easily than a long, loud, joyous, merry fit of laughter, unless it comes from the heart.

"So he is happy! And she is so good, so kind to everyone; she is my forgiving friend, tries to amuse Count Leuthold, and is fairly radiant with joy. Her eyes always sparkle whenever she comes among us: so they are happy; they—"

The terrible thought that had lurked in her mind for days suddenly appeared before Fraulein Jenny in tangible form : “ They will go away together.”

“ From that moment they have seemed completely transformed ; gayer, more cheerful than ever ; smiling at everything and noticing nothing. They mean to go away together.”

With this certainty a terrible calmness came over her. The greatest fury and despair cloak themselves in apparent repose, a terrible, horrible repose ; a quietude that exists only in the deepest recesses of human life. “ If she should die !” Fraulein Jenny said to herself one evening in her room.

Snow clouds darkened the air, forming a dim gray twilight. The whole city seemed oppressed. She was standing before her bureau, one drawer of which she had opened, and her hand rested upon a little packet. “ If she should die !”

Fraulein Jenny had some poison in a little green box, wrapped in blotting paper. She need only strew a little in a cup, and the innocent drink would become a death potion. It was an easy thing to do.

One day the little governess, humming a tune, went into the dining-room where the tea and coffee cups, according to an old custom in the castle, were kept in a *buffet*. Fraulein Jenny smiled as she hummed. Dear me, she would not have done anybody harm, but for a long time she had felt so

strangely oppressed it seemed as if she had just uttered a shriek, that some one must heed. She could not have done anyone harm. But if Countess Marie should die now !

She opened the old-fashioned *buffet*, looked at the cups with their bright paintings in enamel and put them back again. Each member of the family had a certain cup. It was a time when nobody was at home except herself and the servants. She had had a headache, and Countess Flora had gone in the carriage to the park, where the band was playing.

She put the cups back again and slowly returned to her room. At the door she hesitated, but did not go back ; on the contrary she moved along the corridors to her own apartment. Here she again paused, and seemed inclined to retrace her steps. She could not have examined the cups sufficiently.

She walked hastily back, but at the door of the dining-room met Rose, who was just coming out. A smile flitted over the maid's pretty brunette face, she gave some reason for her presence in the dining-room, and then went down stairs in her neat gray dress, smoothing the rebellious waves of hair from her southern face.

Fraulein Jenny entered the dining-room, went to the *buffet*, and counted six, seven little cups. She seemed to miss one, for she searched eagerly, first with her eye and then with her hand ; the delicate

china rattled. And it had just been there, a cup with the portrait of Cardinal Richelieu, from which Countess Marie always took her coffee. It had disappeared within the last five minutes. Who had been here? Rose!

Fraulein Jenny leaned her elbows on the *buffet* and rested her burning head on her hands, while her heart throbbed loudly. The cup had remained empty. That was fortunate. But Rose had taken it away. Rose was an enemy, and this enemy had suspicions.

"Where can she have put the cup?" Fraulein Jenny said to herself, with a throbbing heart and bewildered brain.



CHAPTER XVIII.

Fifteen minutes, half an hour elapsed. The cold red autumnal sunlight still shone into the great lonely palace, and Fraulein Jenny still leaned upon the *buffet*. By degrees her thoughts grew clearer. Her hatred, her despair, her fixed idea: if Countess Marie were no longer in my way! still remained; but in this quarter of an hour, when she felt that she had a dangerous enemy, the despair had already assumed the form of calculation and cunning. Rose was watching her. If she had carried out her intention in regard to the cup she would now have been betrayed and delivered up to justice. She could do nothing, undertake nothing in this house, for the maid in her malice watched everything, and wanted to crush her as soon as she obtained an opportunity. But she would yet revenge herself, and then be happy. Happy! People believe in happiness, even when their hands are stained with sin; would they commit crimes otherwise?

For weeks Fraulein Jenny had found her burden unendurable. Daily, hourly her heart was full of

care, anger, love, or fear, and she was still forced to seem a stranger to the man, who as she said, belonged to her.

And now, when everything was prepared for his departure came the certainty that he had deceived her, shamelessly, pitilessly deceived her, and was about to fly with Countess Marie from her. In the first tumult of rage and despair, she had tried to seize upon a terrible expedient, a terrible vengeance. But before she could prepare the cup, she had been warned by the watchful, awkward, over-hasty enemy who had betrayed herself too soon.

The next day every one in the palace knew that Mademoiselle Rose had been dismissed, and would leave at once. And so it proved.

Mademoiselle Rose had gone to Countess Marie's room, as usual, to dress her hair, came out pale with rage, and retired to her own chamber to pack her trunks. During the young girl's toilet the maid had turned the conversation on the governess' jealousy and thirst for revenge, and Countess Marie, on her own authority, had requested the intriguing informer to leave the house at once.

Rose, with a horrible grimace, left the room and then gayly bid farewell to all in the servant's hall, saying that she had asked for her discharge because she wanted to visit a sick aunt. Yes, and she had

been very lively and affable. Farewells in the servants' hall of a great house are never sad. The acacias in the courtyard cast changeful shadows into the room, the pictures on the walls represent proud generals and haughty dames in ancient costumes, the neighing of the horses in the stables makes daily music, yet the servants' hall is never a home, even if the happiest years have been spent there. People leave it without regret, and are speedily forgotten, for the servants' hall in great houses have always witnessed so much envy, gossip, calumny, malice, and helpless wrath, that no home-like feeling can exist within their walls, pleasant and comfortable as they may seem. In the middle of the bright, sunny autumn afternoon, Rose left the house. A hack was waiting at the entrance, two footmen carried down her two trunks, a light breeze was whirling the withered leaves around the courtyard. Rose took a smiling farewell of Fraulein Jenny, and her eyes said to the little governess: "I shall remain close by. I am being sent away for the service I was going to render against you, but I have you in my grasp. Try anything in the house, and I will say it was you. I know you; I know your thoughts, and that in your mad love you are capable of anything, as I am in my revenge. I hate you."

Then Mademoiselle Rose went down the steps and

gave a female servant a long, affectionate kiss, as if she wanted to get rid of some of her venom. Then the great door closed with a dull sound like a coffin lid, and the carriage rolled away.

Fraulein Jenny had been ill for two days, so Countess Flora was at liberty and allowed to go with Countess Marie to visit old Countess Rernhagen. Countess Marie went to see the old lady very often.

"She has told her all!" Fraulein Jenny said to herself, as she stood behind the autumn flowers that bloomed on her window sill. "And the old fool is happy over my secret. They are all against me. All. And he!" Fraulein Jenny was really ill. She said she had a slight attack of fever, and her dinner was sent to her room. She sat in a wrapper all day long and was very weak, so weak that she often lay on the couch for several minutes with her eyes closed and her head resting on her hand.

She was to lose all. Spite of her poverty she had long been hopeful and happy in her wild, humble love. Then she had undertaken a difficult task. She had devoted her whole life to the happiness of her lover, in whom she expected to find her own. And now, now she was to lose all, her heart was to be completely beggared. Another was to reap the happiness which she had sowed, which belonged to her. Ah, his heart was this rival's—she could not

change, undo that. But he himself! How was she to prevent his treachery? She was defenceless. She would go to Count Leuthold and confess all. What would be the consequences? Would she have justice done her? The old count would rejoice to see a marriage between Oswald and Marie. And *she* would simply be sent away. For one wild moment she thought of bewitching the old count into marrying her himself; selfish old counts are so easily induced to make an unequal match, if people feign sincere love for them. But then, Oswald and Marie would be free, free!

People who write novels strive to account for a human being's fall into sin by a long course of degradation. But man never needs to sink to evil. The human heart is always on the verge of crime when it is absorbed in its own reveries, and suddenly abandoned by the love that alone raises us to higher things.

At such times it is like a child deserted by a cruel mother at night in a raging storm, which totters weeping on till it falls into a river.

Fraulein Jenny had never been really wicked. She had been poor, unloved, left to herself. As a girl at boarding school, where she was educated for a teacher, she became false and deceitful. Then she went among strangers, ready to serve, defiant, smiling, hopeless. At this time she met Count

Oswald. He lived the gay, careless life of a student, she found her first joy, her first love, her first hope, all in him, and gave him her soul forever.

Then she had manœuvred, been silent, talked, hoped, struggled for him. Poor woman!

And now came this beautiful, haughty girl, and there was only one way. If Countess Marie should die! She had already thought of it. But Rose was watching somewhere. She could do nothing here in the house herself. But, then, how was Countess Marie to die? By a stranger's hand, by an open, violent death, from which she would keep aloof. A robber's attack, a struggle, resistance.

She thought of Monsieur Jacques. She had often thought of him during these two days, without exactly knowing why. He was a dissolute man, a drunkard, ready for anything.

Fraulein Jenny no longer had any calm thoughts. There is a quiet madness, a cold anger, more pitiless than the wildest ravings.

On that very evening the factory girl went to her room again.



CHAPTER XIX.

Herr Ilde in his dirty dressing-gown, with his spectacles on his nose, was just closing his shop, and bowed to his lodger, who in her plain black dress glided through the crowd of dealers and Jews into the damp gloomy entry. "Oh! Fraulein Lina. Another leisure evening. You come so seldom." And he grinned till one might really have believed him in love. Lina bowed and said a word or two in reply.

Ilde held the rusty bolt in his hand, and tried to continue the conversation by asking if her brother had come.

Lina replied, "I do not expect him to-day," and with another bow vanished up the rickety stairs. And on this evening Fraulein Jenny really did not expect her brother. On reaching the passage she listened, to try whether she could hear any one moving in the room next hers, and as soon as she had entered her own chamber and lighted the candle

approached the connecting door and rapped. At the knock there was a sound, as if some one were lazily rising from a bed. Then a heavy step crossed the worm-eaten floor, and a sudden fear seized upon the delicate little fair-haired creature. She held the door firmly with her little hand, and timidly exclaimed, "Is it you, Monsieur Jacques?"

"Who the devil should it be?" replied the thick voice of the servant out of work, and at the same time the door was violently shaken. Fraulein Jenny removed her hand, and Monsieur Jacques, with red, glazed eyes, and garments covered with bits of straw, appeared on the threshold. The dim light in the room cast a faint, flickering ray upon his face.

When he saw his kind friend from Paris he stopped yawning and began to grin; then a very uncomfortable expression flitted over his face.

Monsieur Jacques was a bad, corrupt man. He drank too much, and was fond of picking locks; he had neither honor nor honesty. But he helped his sick or unfortunate companions whenever he could, sent tobacco to them in prison, or smoothed their fevered brows as he had the sick rope-dancer's. Moreover, the death of a murderer the long-forgotten suicide which had taken place in that very room, had made a strong impression upon him. He had a kind heart. Only the day before he had said to Rodolfo, who now that he was no longer handsome,

but a common thief, was constantly drunk: "I don't know how it is but I don't want to see Jeanne, with whom I used to be so merry in the Quartier Latin. There is something strange about her—something wicked. I am afraid of her." Now he was forced to welcome her with a grimace. He passed on the threshold. She nodded to him, and still wrapped in her black shawl, went back to the table. Her good friend Monsieur Jacques, had such a terrible smell of brandy and dirty straw.

"Well, Jacques," she said, gayly, "I have brought you some money. It is only a little, but you can make a great deal, as much as you want, if you will do me a trifling service."

"Oh!" he cried, eagerly stretching out the hand which had never been hardened by any honest toil.

She gave him a bank-note which she had kept clenched in her fingers, and then leaned against the table. He thrust it into his vest pocket, and was instantly the man of business. "And the favor?"

"Pshaw! It must be all the same to you. Perhaps"—and she assumed a deep, mock-tragic tone—"perhaps you must kill somebody." The man's flushed face turned very white, and he removed his hat and wiped his brow. "No," said he, "not really? Oh! I am stupid. You were only joking, mademoiselle, but—"

"Joking? No. Have you grown pious?" She

had dropped her shawl on the floor, and now swept her hair back from her face, which wore an expression quite in keeping with the gloomy room. "Suppose I wanted some one killed?"

Monsieur Jacques retreated across the threshold into his own room, covered his face with his hands, and took special care that his kind friend did not attack him with her nails.

"I will tell you something, Mademoiselle Jeanne," he said, hoarsely. "Here in your room, which is often occupied by poor people for a night's rest, some one hung himself because he had murdered a man. I had always thought it a very simple matter before, but since—since—I—I thank you, Mademoiselle Jeanne."

She had grown flushed and anxious, and now tried to turn the whole matter into a jest, for she laughed shrilly, and was about to speak. He interrupted her. "But close by there is a poor lad who is terribly deformed and has no money. He is a very unskilful thief, and he hates everybody, and would like nothing better than to murder some one and get paid for it. I—may I introduce him to you, Mademoiselle Jeanne?"

Monsieur Jacques was an artless, good-natured fellow, but also somewhat timid and fearful, for he had retreated into his own room and laid his hand on the latch of the door. Fraulein Jenny still

laughed, as if the whole affair were a good joke. She seemed to want to amuse herself to-day. As Monsieur Jacques laid his hand on the latch, the door opened, and a man with a swollen, livid face, clad in a dirty, shaggy coat, with delicate torn boots on his feet, entered, and bowed to the young girl. "I am at your service," said he.

Monsieur Jacques laughed heartily. "He has been listening," he exclaimed.

It was now Fraulein Jenny's turn to be frightened. She had involuntarily started back at the sight of the young vagabond's horrible face, and he hated her in his heart, as he abhorred all who shrank from his ugliness. But he bowed again, gracefully and easily, with all the pliant suppleness he had once shown on the trapeze.

"My neighbor isn't handsome," said Monsieur Jacques, pleasantly, "but he has such a hatred toward every one."

At the end of a quarter of an hour Rodolfo sat at the rickety table with Fraulein Jenny. The dim light was burning between them. The latter said, "Yes. The family will be at Castle Kopa during the next few days. One is a girl, a silly creature. If we agree, I will come here on the evening of the day after to-morrow, and we will both go to Castle Kopa by the ten o'clock train, but not in the same carriage. It is only a ride of three-quarters of an

hour, and then you must wait in the park. I shall find a way to lure the girl there. And—and it would be well if she should not come back.” She uttered the words in a low, smothered tone, and her green eyes rested steadily on the rope-dancer.

“Yes,” said he; but there was no change in the expression of his hideous face.

“You will take the girl’s watch and purse, so that people may say it was a robber and she resisted him; then hurry back to the station, and either return to the city by the eleven o’clock train or go on. No one will know, and I shall remain in the castle with the guests, so that no one can suppose I have any share in the matter. Your meeting will be thought an unfortunate accident. Here is a trifle now. You shall have three hundred florins day after to-morrow, before we go to work, and two hundred after it is accomplished.”

“Very well. And what is her name?” he asked.

“What do you care for that? If you should wish to betray me I might perhaps be ruined; but you would remain as poor as a church-mouse. Do you understand me?”

“I shan’t be stupid enough to betray a customer,” he replied, in his fresh, musical voice, which was so strangely out of harmony with the distorted face.

A feeling of loathing suddenly overpowered Fraulein Jenny, and she raised her handkerchief to her

eyes to shut out the hideous countenance. Rodolfo laughed strangely as he noticed it.

Then they talked on by the dim light for some time longer, and at last Fraulein Jenny took her hat from the bed, and looked around. She wanted to say farewell to Monsieur Jacques, but he was lying, in his ragged livery, on the dirty mattress in his own room sound asleep.

Rodolfo gallantly took the lamp and lighted the young girl down the tottering stairs. She said a few pleasant words through her black veil and Rodolfo kept his left hand in his pocket clenching the bank-note, while he held the lamp in his right. He was calculating that in three days he should have as much money as if he were handsome, and in so doing forgot to say "good-night."

"How rich she must be," he said aloud, as he returned. "And how she loathes me."

He leaned against the damp wall of the passage and yawned. He had been drunk all the evening, and Fraulein Jenny had not noticed it, for the brandy did not stupefy him; he could not forget; he was only full of rage and anger, and this concealed his condition.



CHAPTER XX.

The servants were packing. The old count's *valet* was packing his master's smallest trunk, Count Oswald's man was arranging all his luggage, and Betti, the new maid, was putting up Countess Marie's clothing: only a few articles that would be needed for two or three days. But among these two or three toilettes Countess Marie ordered numerous trifles to be packed which she could not possibly want during the hunt; her parents' portraits, all her jewelry, her prayer-books, albums, and a great many little boxes.

The maid spoke of this when she afterward went to Fraulein Jenny's room to help her. "Oh! I thank you, I have just finished. I shall only take a travelling-bag," said the governess.

"Yes, I think so, too," said the maid. "But the Countess Marie is packing a whole trunk."

Fraulein Jenny laughed. "Where is she going first?" she thought when she was again alone.

“Probably to some German Gretna Green, where—”

Before dismissing the girl she said, “Betti, tell Heinrich to request Count Oswald to honor me with a short call.”

“Here?”

“Yes, here,” said Fraulein Jenny, with a slight frown, looking haughtily at her.

Betti expressed no farther surprise, but made a low courtesy and left the room. She was a simple young country girl, and had not been in the house long. But she would improve, and was already beginning to gossip and calculate. Now, for the first time, it occurred to her that the governess was really the most important personage in the house. Half an hour later—it was a cold, dreary, cheerless morning—Count Oswald entered Fraulein Jenny’s room, as he used to enter it in the old days in sunny Paris—entered with a flushed, kindly face, and put his arm around her. She wore a pretty, green dress, and looked fairer than ever. She was so beautiful, so pale, and her teeth glittered at every word. She laughed gayly as she looked up at him. “I sent for you, Oswald,” she said, merrily, as she used to speak. Both had the same manner as when they first began to love each other. He knew that this was the last time he should ever speak to her, and she felt it might be the last if her deed of vio-

lence failed. So they were both apparently the same as of old—both false—both breathed with difficulty. She loved him more fondly than ever, even in the days of her happiness, and he pitied her.

“Yes, and it was quite right, but I should have come at any rate, Bibi,” said he. “I wanted to see you once more before my departure, to bid you adieu, assure you that all is well.”

“*Is* all well?”

His face flushed, and he kissed her almost passionately. “Yes, it is well for me to go; when I return, all that stood between us will be over. I—I love you, you dear little thing.”

“Yes, you love me,” she replied. “How fortunate that is! For I could crush you if you did not return—I love you better than anything else in the world, Oswald, that is, you are myself. If you should be false to me, I could hate, murder you, without pity. If you should betray me, you would be a dishonorable man.”

“Dishonorable!”

“Your heart would no longer have any honor. And now, farewell.” She threw her arms around him and gazed earnestly into his face. “Do you love me?” she asked, in a low, firm tone; “love me as you once did?”

He could not utter the lie. And he must release

himself from her embrace, he felt as if he were stifling.

"Come, speak," she said, still gazing intently at him.

"No!" he said at last, clenching his hand, while a feeling of sudden hatred toward her arose in his heart; for we always hate where we ought to love and cannot. "Not now. You know—do not torture me."

"Yes, I know you have sacrificed yourself, and are going away to be cured and learn to love me again. Is it not so? But suppose you meant to practice some treachery upon me?"

He was not false. He had really only intended to go away to cure himself of his love. But then Countess Marie came and said, "I love you, too." We always belong to the person we love, and he suddenly found nature, happiness, justice, incompatible with what Jenny had called the honor of the heart. His frank, open, honorable nature made him suffer the torments of hell. "Farewell," said he. He forced himself to take her hand, and as he bent over her his lips seemed to shrink from the caress. She saw it. Yet she kissed him—coldly, scornfully, with a heart full of silent wrath. So they parted. She did not suspect that it was really forever. He did not look back, and she did not glance at him. Her face was buried in her little

white hands. "Whom shall I kill?" moaned a voice within; "her—him—or myself?"

After dinner was over, Count Leuthold said, with his usual quiet dignity: "You lucky fellow. Marie looks at you constantly. You will be the heir; and the two girls will have generous legacies. If you married Marie, you would wed both rank and beauty, and I should see the splendor and dignity of our name secured—*mauvais sujet*. Do me the favor to fall in love with her."

Count Oswald's heart throbbed with bitter pain as he smilingly grasped his brother's hand. "How happy we might all be if Jeanne were not here, he thought, with a feeling of positive hatred. "If Jeanne were dead——"

* * * * *

The family was to go to Castle Kopa after midnight, by the one o'clock train. The hunt began the next day, and all the owners of the neighboring estates were to assemble at a certain hour.

The night before the day fixed for the journey every one in the palace retired early, directly after supper, in order to be fresher for the trip, and on this day Fraulein Jenny left the palace. At ten o'clock at night, in her usual stealthy manner, she glided out of the little side door, of which the servants had the key, in order not to disturb the por-

ter. And it was Herr Ilde's lodger who left the palace.

"She must die. Why did she come in my way?" thought the black-robed, shabby, lonely girl, as she hurried through the dark streets toward her room. "She took him from me, in spite of my entreaties, though I told her he was mine. Oh, God! how can a woman be so cruel?" She closed her lips as if to force back sobs, then laughed under her rusty veil; "I should have been so, too. She loves him! And she came later than I. That is the sole reason he fancies he loves her. If she had been his betrothed, and I had come in the way, it would have been the same. How base men are!" Her heart contracted with a fierce pang of jealousy. "She shall die. What is a life? I have given him mine. And I will make him happy—I understand him—I will—" She paused.

It was a gloomy night. A pale, cold, autumn moon pierced forth between the clouds, and the black outlines of a church appeared beside her, as if suddenly risen from the earth. She was tired, wearied almost unto death. She loved him more than ever, loved him madly, yet she wished to do no evil. The struggle almost paralyzed her. She leaned against one of the pillars that supported the temple of the Lord. The moon did not shine upon her. She was completely in the shadow. She

closed her eyes, clenched her hands, and shivered with a strange chill. She fancied that she was in the church, and the notes of the organ were echoing in her heart. She was as weak as a child, but at that moment not wicked. She hated and yet pitied herself. What a terrible deed she was going to commit—cause a murder! In the dying hour our thoughts are prophetic, and she felt as if she were dying. She was so weak, so helpless! Oh, God! was death really near? A strange presentiment came over her. For a moment she thought of killing herself. But then they would be happy. Happy! The word excited her to madness. In madness and death the thoughts are prophetic; if she should die, she saw, in imagination, Oswald happy with his new love. The head that had so often rested on her breast, the eyes that had once beamed so brightly upon her, now found greater happiness in another. Oswald and Marie would be united and have a child, a sweet child, that might perhaps bear the name of Jeanne. And perhaps they would often speak of the poor girl, who had died rather than disturb their happiness. Perhaps some day even say to the child: “You were named for a woman who loved your father so fondly, so fondly that she at last gave her life for him.” And then the little child would clasp her little hands and pray for her. Fraulein Jenny wept bitterly. But

no! She could not make the resolution. If she killed herself, perhaps her haughty, hated rival would rejoice, and Oswald would soon forget her in the intoxication of happiness, for nothing is more thankless than joy. The girl must die.

Fraulein Jenny hurried on.

In the house toward which she was hastening the rope-dancer sat watching for her.

"She will come and bring me the money to-day," he said to himself.

He sat in the corridor—on the dirty floor of the corridor, before the room hired by the factory girl, who was a great lady. He had put on his shaggy coat, clasped his arms around his knees, and crouched in the darkness. "And I am to kill a lady, who is beloved, or good, or something. And she, this little lady, has money, a great deal of money, and wants to be revenged. Suppose I should murder *her, her!* In the dark. That would be a quicker way; she has the money with her. I hate all who have money! And I could not kill the other. What is she to me? I could only kill some one whom I—I have never done such a thing. How shall I feel? Pshaw! I can't bear these people. They would leave me to starve like a wild beast. But I think I could only kill a person I hated!

There was in the terrible thought some vague remnant of a kind heart; a nature that perhaps,

under different circumstances, might not have been evil.

“And I hate this little woman, who is so rich and so beautiful, and—I wonder how the other looks. Kill some one! so that she will lie stiff and motionless. I never saw a dead body. She has the money with her. I must live. She shrank from me so. Every one scorns me. The very beggars will not stand beside me. How could I grow so ugly? I often try to smile as pleasantly as I did on the trapeze, and everyone is horrified. I can’t steal. And I must have something to drink. How long will it be before I grow old and die? Oh! so long! I must earn something. Yes, and this woman who wants me to kill some one—this wicked, rich, beautiful woman!—”

Herr Ilde’s favorite lodger was standing in the room, lighting her little lamp. The rope-dancer, with his savage face, shaggy coat, and laced scarlet boots, entered, holding something hidden in his breast. His voice was hoarse from the brandy he had drunk. “Have you brought all the money with you?”

She suddenly started and fled to the window. A terrible dread seized upon her. She did not know what answer she ought to make. He came nearer, with a heavy, yet stealthy tread, and repeated the question, with a look full of hatred and fear of



"DO YOU KNOW—THE HONOR OF A HEART?"—See Page 165.

what he was going to do. He had never seen a dead body.

She knew not what to do, except fall on her knees and stammer, "Yes, oh! yes!" She was gasping for breath, yet tried to smile at him. She had already won, conciliated, guided so many by her smile. But if he meant to serve her, why did he look at her so, why did he seize her hand? "Oh, God! oh, God!"

She fell back, with a stifled cry, and a deep gash in her throat.

The next instant he was rumaging in her bag with frantic haste—with frantic haste and horror.

He had never seen any one dead. But why did they all shrink from him so? His hands were red with the blood that gushed from her neck, but he skillfully kept the banknotes unstained, and thrust them into the pockets of his shaggy coat. There.

He could only kill those he hated. The wicked, the rich, the beautiful, not those to whom people wished and did evil—as they did to him!

This thought was the one faint gleam of excuse for the murderer, who fled from his first victim, trembling, shivering, and despairingly repeating—he had been dreaming. A voice in his heart wailed loudly, as if over the grave of some beloved person. How he had hated this woman! And now! With what rapturous joy he would have shouted if he

could have brought her to life. The flying murderer would have kissed the dust away from her poor little feet.

* * * * *

Count Oswald and Countess Marie, though they knew it not, were now free and happy.

And after one short quarter of an hour, Fraulein Jenny died. Her dim eyes opened once more, but she could no longer move a limb of her bleeding body. Those eyes beheld, as if through dingy glass, an empty, dirty room, and sought her lover; then they dilated with a strange horror, gazed for one long second into the void of eternity, and then light died out forever.

* * * * *

May God have mercy on the dead, the murderer, and the happy.

THE END.

THE LAST SOLEJ.

A Novel.

✓ BY
W. BERGSÖE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

By MARY J. SAFFORD.

NEW YORK:
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W. J. Bergsöe

[Signature]

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THE LAST SOLEJ.



SOLEJ was the name of a farm-house which stood in a narrow valley among the mountains. In summer, when the sun was highest, a faint golden light filtered through the black firs which shaded the windows and flickered in dancing yellow flecks over a few geraniums whose long, luxuriant branches twined around the window-panes. All the rest of the year Solej was in shadow, during the winter amid the snow and in spring in the mire; for the melted snow that swelled the mountain streams covered the whole road with greyish white foam, and even washed the foundations of the building.

Seen from a distance, Solej looked like the swallows nests that are fastened to the cliffs—but if one went down into the valley the black, gloomy buildings

resembled one large and two small coffins, for the long main dwelling and the two barns beside it were not painted red like those on the other farms, but smeared from top to bottom with black tar to keep out the dampness. Solemn and dark the grey cliff towered behind it, silent and gloomy rose the long row of sombre firs in front, and Solej itself was still and sad now as ever—happiness had never dwelt long within its walls. One generation after another had grown up there, stretching out arms of eager yearning for sunlight, joy and deliverance, but death alone had heard their prayers.

Mire and mould had coated the walls of the house and seemed to have even entered into the blood of its inmates. Each generation had faded away like the geraniums at the windows; for as the old physician said “where the sun cannot enter, I am always wanted,” and he was right. He attended the father, the mother, the two daughters and, whenever he came, death was his attendant.

At last only two sons were left, “the last at Solej,” as they were called in the parish, Guttorm, the younger brother, a lad of eighteen, and Od, a giant of twenty-four, who looked as if he might be the boy’s father. But Od, from early childhood, had worked for the rich land-owner, Halvard Sämundsen, of Fosnäs, and there the sun shone and happiness reigned. When the bells tolled at the

funeral of the last sister, the two brothers lingered after the notes had died away to pray beside the new-made grave which contained all that they had loved in this world. On the way home to Solej they resolved to sell the farm and go to a third sister, who lived in that land of marvels, free America. She had gone with her husband when very young, across the broad ocean to the distant West, and in writing of her happiness everything glittered with the rosy radiance of the setting sun.

“Where yonder sun sinks in the sea
There’s happiness and joy for thee,”

she had sung long, long years before to Guttorm.

Od thought that he himself would make a capital lumber man, while delicate Guttorm, with his beautiful melancholy eyes, played the fiddle so well that the girls in the neighborhood sometimes danced merrily to the music and sometimes wept to hear its strains.

A fortnight later an auction was held, but nobody attended it except Halvard Sämundsen, and he bought the farm for a song—shortly after it was rumored that the last of the Solej family were going to emigrate.

A dense gray mist shrouded the valley. It had rained in torrents for several days, but now the north wind had dispelled the sultriness of August

and the moisture was rising in heavy columns of fog. The mountain stream rushed foaming into the valley, where it was still almost oppressively hot. The rain hung in heavy drops on the leaves of the birches and dripped down upon the moss and ferns that grew in the chinks of the rocks.

The sky was still bluish-gray and covered with clouds, only here and there the sun burst through sending a quivering shaft of light upon the mists that had gathered in the narrow valley and could find no outlet. Higher up the fog-veils grew thinner and were pierced by the black summits of the fir trees which stood like a row of grave knights, each wearing a collar of fog. Below, between the stream and the cliff, a narrow path led up to Fosnas, along which Guttorm and Od were walking, both equipped with high rubber boots and thick, coarse coats. Od carried a heavy knapsack, Guttorm a lighter one, from which peeped out the treasured fiddle carefully wrapped in a seal-skin cover. Both moved slowly and silently. Now and then Guttorm turned and glanced back towards Solej; but the place was shrouded in mist. Suddenly he said:

“Let us wait until to-morrow! We shan’t reach Fosnas before dark.”

“And Guri?” asked Od.

Guttorm made no reply, but slackened his pace.

"Why are you weeping?" asked Od, grasping his brother's arm.

"I'm not weeping. It's only the water dripping from my cap," he answered.

Od released his arm with a jerk, and they again moved on side by side in silence.

It began to rain again—at first only as a fine mist, which by degrees increased to a steady pour. The path became almost impassable, the stream had overflowed its banks in some places, and now and then the deep silence was interrupted by a dull, distant roar, caused by the water plunging over a high cliff just below Fosnas, where Halvard Samundsen lived. The brothers were on their way there to get the purchase money for Solej. At last they approached the bridge, across which the road to Fosnas led, but when they came down the hill they could see no trace of it. Guttorm thought it was the fault of the mist; but Od's fears were unfortunately confirmed. The stream had swept it away and the beams and planks hung between the cliffs, protruding from the water like the ribs of a huge whale. Only the posts and cross-beams remained, and the foaming water dashed swirling beneath.

"We must have the money," said Od, taking off his heavy boots with the aid of the iron clamps by which the posts were fastened.

"Surely we can wait until to-morrow," replied Guttorm.

"The ship won't wait for us," retorted Od, turning the legs of his boots down to keep out the moisture.

"True," answered Guttorm sighing. "Let us go then."

"No, you must stay here. A boy like you ought not to risk such a thing."

"Do you think so?" asked Guttorm, trying to pull his own boots off by the posts of the bridge—but in vain, he was too small.

"Stay here," said Od, laying his huge hand on his brother's shoulder. "You would rather play for Guri than for the water-nixies?"

"What do you mean?" asked Guttorm.

"I dreamed about you last night," replied Od, "and whatever one dreams during the last night at home will come true, Mother Marli says."

"What did you dream?"

"I dreamed we were walking beside the stream hunting for birds' eggs, and an owl flew down and pecked out one of your eyes. I seized my gun and was going to shoot it, when it changed into an eagle which struck its claws into you and carried you off across the water. There it dropped you; I heard a scream and woke."

"I probably cried out in my sleep, I sometimes do since my illness."

"Yes, you shrieked, and drops of cold perspiration were standing on your forehead," replied Od. "Stay here, I have a presentiment that some misfortune may befall you. You will stay, won't you?"

"And Guri?" asked Guttorm in his turn.

"I will take your love to her, and tell her of our plans. Next year she can come over with the captain, and then your violin must support you both. She is betrothed to you, and you can leave her here for that time without anxiety."

He took the knapsack from his shoulder, flung it across the stump on which Guttorm sat, turned, and went towards the bridge.

Guttorm started up, seized him by the coat, and said: "Be careful, Od, you are taking a perilous path."

"Not a year passed during my time of service in Fosnas that I did not cross the river at least once while it was in a similiar state," Od answered.

"I don't fear the water," Guttorm answered. "There is no one so strong and agile as you."

"What are you afraid of, then?" asked Od, swinging himself upon the first beams.

"Beware of Halvard Sämundsen! He has heard of our agreement with Guri. And you know he has long had an eye upon her."

“Well, what more?” said Od, scornfully.

Guttorm, with a single bound, reached his brother's side. Let me go with you,” he pleaded. Halvard Sämundsen was at Solej yesterday. He met me with Guri near the stable—”

“Well?” Od questioned.

“He threatened to kill me, me or any one else who dared to come between him and Guri. Let me go with you, Od. True, I am not so strong as you, but I won't allow you to visit Fosnäs alone.”

Od stooped and picked up the heavy boots he had placed on one of the posts of the bridge. Then he tied them together with a bit of rope, flung them over his shoulder, and after completing his preparations very slowly and carefully, he threw his right arm around his brother and set him on the ground as though he had been a child.

“Which of us is the stronger?” he called, nodding kindly, as he wiped off the foam sprinkled by the waves on his beard, and pursued his way.

Guttorm stood watching him until his gigantic figure grew smaller and smaller—it seemed as though the mist was devouring him—at last he vanished from his gaze. Guttorm still remained in the same spot. The foam from the rushing water dashed into his eyes; he wiped it away and again stared fixedly into the dense cloud-wreaths—never had he so fully realized his love for his strong

brother. Then he heard a shrill, piercing whistle. Od had crossed safely.

Guttorm stooped and tried to answer the signal, but his lungs were weaker and he could not drown the roar of the water. He picked up Odd's dripping knapsack, wiped it, and carefully concealed it under a rock on the shore. Then, seating himself on a stone, he gazed with an apparently vacant stare at the white, foam-crested waves dashing around the dark masses of rock at his feet. But his thoughts were seething as restlessly among the cliffs that beset his life-path as the troubled waters of the stream surged below. Ever since he could remember, he had longed to leave this place. Many a lonely evening, at Solej, he had wept bitterly, on account of this ardent longing to go far away, had keenly felt the oppression and constraint, visible in his father, mother, and sisters, as well as in the natural scenery surrounding him. He had read of Ole Bull, who, a poor boy, like himself, had gone to distant, foreign lands and returned home, rich and honored. He had played in far-away America, and thousands had listened to his music; endless applause greeted him wherever he appeared, and the diamonds set in his bow, glittered like lightning flashes accompanying the thunder of the notes. To leave Solej, fly far beyond the mountains to the land of fame, and return like Ole Bull amid the acclama-

tions of the crowd—this had been his dream, the goal of his aspirations and longing ; it had quivered through his music, lending it a peculiar charm. He would be a famous man, like Ole Bull—this was his firm resolve.

Then one evening he chanced to meet Guri at Fosnas, and from that time his dreams changed. Halvard Samundsen had brought her from Christiania. “She is the child of aristocratic people,” he said, and there were many proofs of the truth of his words. She was slender, small, and delicate, her work was quietly done, yet everything was as pleasant as a smile. She managed the house, the farm, nay, even looked after the shop when Halvard was away ; for she could not only read and write, but could keep accounts, too, “and much better than I can,” Halvard Samundsen said. Guttorm came one evening to buy strings for his fiddle and met her in the shop. Halvard was absent on a journey. Guri selected the strings for him herself, and he stretched them on the fiddle and tuned them. Then she begged him to play. At first he refused, not thinking it seemly to play to so dainty a lady.

“Then I will play for *you*,” she replied, and went into the best room where stood a piano Halvard had taken in pledge for some money the pastor owed him. Guttorm had never seen one, but when she began to play he seized his violin and accom-

panied her—it seemed as though they were dancing together. He did not know how it came about, but when he went home the stars were shining in the midnight heavens and he felt as if he had flown far away like a swallow that rests for the first time in the shadow of the palms. After that evening his fiddle needed new strings very often; they were continually snapping when he played in the dark room at home. Sometimes he heard in the distance from Fosnas the notes of a shepherd's horn; then he knew that Halvard Samundsen had set off on a journey; for playing on the piano was not the only thing that Guri could do.

One evening tears sparkled in her eyes, she made short answers and did not wish to play. She wrapped the strings for him in a bit of paper—he must go.

“But why?”

She would not reply—he must go. Guttorm went to the door and she looked after him while entering the strings in her account book.

Guttorm came slowly back, put his arms around her, stooped, and asked her what he had done. Guri's tears now fell in torrents and she told the whole story. Halvard had gone away the day before, but in the evening ere his departure he had entered her room, embraced her, and told her how gladly he would make his little book-keeper his wife

He was going to Christiania and would arrange the matter with her relations.

He left her without waiting for a reply; but the next morning he had put his hand under her chin and given her the betrothal kiss before the eyes of everybody. She did not want to marry him! Ah, indeed she did not! But what in the world could a poor desolate girl do? She had not a single human being to whom she could appeal for aid!

When Guttorm went home that evening his dream had assumed another form. Ole Bull and his diamond studded bow no longer allured him. He saw only a pair of eyes that had gazed into his face so beseechingly, felt the pressure of a hand that had rested on his heart, the quiver of lips that had touched his own. Honor, fame, and wealth dissolved into wreaths of mist, and when he now looked forward to the future he beheld a little house on the edge of the primeval forest in that distant land—and in the doorway Guri singing. But with the song and his quiet happiness blended fierce thoughts of vengeance upon Halvard Samundsen, who held her captive like a caged bird that was his property, property to which he had a rightful claim. What did he possess? Nothing but money. What did he want? A book-keeper—and Guri suited him for that purpose.

Then it chanced that Halvard approached the

couple near the barn at Solej. He had long been suspicious of them, but would not suffer himself to believe that the suspicion was well founded.

Guri had never ventured to leave Fosnas especially in the evening, and now he found her, his own property, in Guttorm's arms. Had not Od been near he would undoubtedly have killed them both, so great was his rage. But he contented himself with warning Guttorm and dragging Guri home by force. But how would she fare now and what would befall Od? Samundsen was, if possible, even stronger than his powerful brother.

Guttorm again looked across the stream, whose waters surged and roared ceaselessly. The yellow-white foam on the waves looked very ugly, and ugly visions rose before his mind. Could the tale rumored in the neighborhood when he was a mere child have been true? Yonder, where stately massive Fosnas now stood, Halvard Samundsen only twelve years ago had lived as a poor peddler in a wretched little hut. A rich Englishman came there to buy silver buttons and to fish for salmon, and Halvard served as his guide. One evening Halvard rowed him across the stream, moored the boat to a cliff and went into the woods to pick berries for his wealthy guest. Evening had closed in when he returned to find boat and Englishman gone. Halvard said that the foreigner must have

loosed the skiff and gone down the little river, but the strange part of the story was that, from that day forth the once poor man had plenty of money.

When he built three wings to Fosnas and put large glass windows in the main building, the people kept silence and only the stream talked on. No one understood the language of the water, but *one* thing was noticed by Halvard's neighbors, especially those who had known him from childhood—he began to drink! Not in the company of others, or on festal occasions. On the contrary, he was always sober at such times and never caused quarrels. No, his drinking was done in a very strange way. He sat alone, with locked doors, in the room behind the shop and drank, often to excess, while talking continually to himself. Often long intervals occurred, during which he did not touch a glass of gin though he sold it himself in the shop. But when the thirst for liquor was coming on, people always knew it in advance. It was like the calm before a storm. He became taciturn and could not rest indoors, but longed to be out. He often walked for miles among the mountains or through the woods, but was never seen near the river. He sought lonely paths, and if he met any one, he either avoided him or turned back. On reaching home he was utterly exhausted, but would not eat a mouthful, locked himself into the baek room, closed even the shutters, lighted—

whether the season was winter or summer—a fire in the huge stove, and brought in two bottles of gin with his own hands. When his servants saw him they shrank timidly away, knowing that the storm would burst during the night. They could hear him talking in the dark room lighted only by the fire, but no one understood what he said. He talked incessantly, sometimes in loud tones, sometimes softly, often in two different voices. Sometimes he started up, pounded the table, swore violently, then relapsed into low whispers. About midnight there was a hoarse, gasping noise from the locked room, a heavy fall, and then utter silence—he had raged himself into unconsciousness. There seemed to be nothing really dangerous in the matter, yet all Fosnas dreaded the storm when they noticed its approach. Twice he had entered the shop about sunset to get more liquor, and both times he had behaved in so unruly a fashion that people were called to bind him. The following day he had always been as gentle as a lamb and set off on a journey. Guri on these occasions took charge of everything,

Guri! Guttorm's thoughts leaped across the river, up the cliff, and into the little room with which he had grown so familiar. What would become of Guri, now that he was going away, and Halvard knew of their betrothal? He felt more

and more plainly that he must see and speak to her again, cost what it might. But the stream?

Just at that moment a long-drawn, plaintive note pierced the dense fog, quivering through the air high above the roar of the waves. He started up, every muscle tense with excitement—it was the sound of Guri's horn! He knew it only too well; what did it mean? With a swift jerk he snatched off his knapsack and laid it beside his brother's, but it rolled farther on, slipped down the steep bank and hung on a jutting rock near the water's edge.

He left it there and hurried towards the bridge. In an instant he had climbed one of the posts and, unheeding the surging waves at his feet, leaped from beam to beam so that the timbers swayed beneath his weight. When he reached the opposite shore he glanced back, wondering that he had escaped, then drawing on his boots set off along the path to Fosnas.

He did not wish to go to the house, but turned aside into a path winding between some young birch-trees whose wet branches brushed against his face. It was steep and narrow, and led to a patch of turf near the wall of the farm-yard used for bleaching the household linen. Guri had told him of this sunny, sheltered spot behind the cliff down which plunged the roaring waves of the stream. To-day he could see neither sun nor river—nothing

but mist and drifting clouds, yet Guttorm suspected that she was waiting for him there—and where *she* was there could be no need of sunshine.

When he at last reached the spot it lay empty and desolate between the bare, bleak rocks, on which not even the birch-trees could find root. On the left was a sheer precipice at whose foot the thundering roar of the river was distinctly audible through the gray veil of mist; on the right were two slender fir-trees and the red buildings of Fosnas, all shrouded in fog—lonely and silent.

Guttorm resolved to wait, and sat down under a jutting rock whence he could overlook the house. Now and then he fancied he heard a noise, something that sounded almost like a shriek; but the roar of the torrent was so loud that it could not fail to drown any sound from human lips. Suddenly the fog lifted, a bright glow gilded the tops of the fir-trees on the opposite side of the stream—it was the setting sun making a last effort to send a farewell greeting to the mist-wreathed earth! The whole forest trembled with the chill of evening, a gust of wind shook the rain drops from the boughs. Then the clouds parted, and the warm, rosy sunset light illumined the turf-grown terrace and formed a rainbow over the cataract, which, at this moment, looked like a stream of red wine pouring down the cliff.

Guttorm was spell-bound by the spectacle. Never

had the valley and stream seemed so beautiful, even the dark windows of Solej glittered with a golden radiance and cast shafts of reflected sunshine into the dispersing masses of mist. He gazed down at the river, whose rosy foam dashed upwards at his feet, every flower and fern on the bank sparkled as if strewn with diamonds. Never had he beheld such a sunset, and he involuntarily hummed the lines of the old song his sister had taught him.

“Where yonder sun sinks in the sea,
There’s happiness and joy for thee.”

Just at that instant he felt a violent blow on the back and, with a loud cry, fell upon his knees. When he regained his footing, Halvard was standing before him, tall and strong as a giant, with bristling hair, glaring eyes, and crimson face. With almost superhuman power he clutched Guttorm by the throat, dragged him close to him, and stared into his eyes.

“Good Heavens, what are you doing!” gasped the youth, who felt Halvard’s hand clenching his throat closer. But Halvard did not answer, he only tightened his grasp, and Guttorm perceived with terrible certainty that the madman’s iron hand was forcing him nearer and nearer to the precipice.

An awful foreboding overpowered him and,

wrenching himself free, he groaned: "Halvard, Halvard, what are you doing? Is not *one* enough?"

Halvard again drew him close: "Do you know that? Then the river will surely have room for two."

"Let me go!" shrieked Guttorm, who felt the ground yielding under his feet. "I will never betray you."

Halvard again dragged him close, so close that his red, bloated face touched Guttorm's. "A pleasant journey!" he mumbled. "Now I'll go to Guri."

And he relaxed his grasp on his victim.

"Guri!" shrieked Guttorm, extending his arms as he plunged backward over the precipice.

Neither cry nor fall was heard,—the thundering roar of the torrent drowned every sound. But in the gulf below, the foaming water seethed violently and dashed upwards in crimson drops. Then these, too, vanished, and the waves dashed on as impetuously as before.

Halvard stared at the red whirlpool an instant, then flung the piece of turf Guttorm had torn in his fall, down into the gulf beneath. The sun sank behind the forest, the mists again rose from the valley, and in the cold, damp night air Halvard plunged into the depths of the woods, muttering to himself in a low tone and shrinking timidly aside

whenever his fancy perceived a human figure in the distance.

* * * * *

Years had passed—twenty-three years—and many changes occur in so long a time. The place where Solej had stood was now occupied by a saw-mill owned by Halvard Samundsen, who annually sent thousands of logs floating down the stream, for all the woods stretching from Solej far beyond Fosnas belonged to him. In the garden where Guttorm and Od had played in their childhood a factory had been erected, in which during the summer the mountain stream turned the wheels, while in winter a light cloud of steam rising above the roof showed that energetic Halvard Samundsen was not to be stopped when the frost king laid his fetters on the water.

The valley, too, was changed. A certain air of prosperity pervaded it, due partly to better times, partly to Halvard's liberality where religious matters were concerned. The rough, frail wooden structure, that had formerly crossed the stream, had given place to a delicate iron suspension bridge, over which the train glittering brightly in the sunshine, dashed panting and puffing to stop at the newly-built station, ere turning toward the mountains where it vanished among the cliffs as though by some magic spell. Halvard had succeeded, at a

parish meeting, in gaining consent to have the ruinous old church with its queer tower, projecting cornice, and steep wooden roof, pulled down, with the parsonage adjoining. It had cost him 10,000 thalers to carry out his plan—but what was that for a man whose logs leaped like salmon in the mountain stream, while floating down from Fosnas to Drammen? Nobody should say that he was avaricious.

Who could have such an idea? People need only look at the changes which had taken place in Fosnas. The red wooden houses had made way for substantial, massive buildings with glass windows. A path—an extension of the one by which Guttorm had come to his death—had been cut through the rocks, and Halvard, who seemed haunted by the fear that some one might fall over the precipice, had had a solid stone wall built along the bleaching ground, so that one could gaze without being giddy into the terrible gulf along which the foaming river rushed, scattering its shower of snowy spray over the turf. This grass-plot was now a portion of the garden, fruit-trees had been planted in it, and a broad gravelled walk, bordered with box, led directly to the best room in Fosnas. There was one thing the parish could not exactly understand—why Halvard, when he rebuilt Fosnas, had made the front of the house face the woods, the outlook was so dreary and confined. The best room alone had a view of the river,

but Halvard never went into that room. Even on Christmas eve, when the servants danced there, they were obliged to cross the courtyard to drink their master's health. He could not bear the stream, its roar was horrible to him, especially in the spring, when it was swollen by the melting snows. At this season he usually went to Drammen or Christiania. But at Christmas there was no pretext for his absence, yet he never entered the best room nor set foot in the garden.

Halvard Samundsen was rich, very rich; but was he happy? The younger generation did not doubt it; even envied him; but the old people in the parish took a different view. What could it avail to have built a massive church and handsome parsonage, if his own home remained empty and desolate? Guri had waited the second and third year, as well as the first; then she gave up hope. The sun of her happiness had set in the distant West, she thought—for the promised letter had never come, neither from Guttorm nor Od. The latter had had a discussion with Halvard, whom he had found drunk and who had brutally refused the purchase money for Solej. After long persuasion, however, Od obtained it, but when he was passing through the door Halvard kicked him. Od turned and seizing him by the shoulder pushed him violently several times against the bed posts. Halvard

rushed furiously at him, but Od coolly shut the door in his face and went away, while Halvard jumped out of the window and ran across the bleaching ground to overtake him, but instead found Guttorm who was waiting for Guri. What happened then no one knew save the mist, and the river.

Od had set out on his return at once, crossed the bridge safely, and saw Guttorm's knapsack hanging among the cliffs, while his own lay near it on the bank. He searched and called but received no answer, lost his way in the dense mist and came out of the woods again some distance below, where several rocks obstructed the course of the torrent. Here he found Guttorm's hat, washed ashore by the waves. Now everything became clear—Guttorm had attempted to cross the bridge.

Od had one of those strong, reserved natures, which, though secretly deeply moved by grief, always maintain outward calmness. He had fondly loved his pale, fragile brother, loved him as a father loves his child, and he wept bitterly as he concealed the hat in his knapsack. But what would lamentations avail? Guttorm was dead, and the ship bound for the distant West was waiting for the living. Write to Guri? Why should he? He could not restore Guttorm to her, and her life was hard enough already. So he went away and, when once in the distant West, living in the primeval forests,

it seemed as though Norway and Guri were so far off that no letter would ever reach them. Often, especially at sunset, he thought of Guttorm and his promised wife. His heart softened at the memory, but his hands had grown too hard to write.

The first six months Guri felt as if she were in a dream. Halvard was absent from Fosnas during the whole time, nay he even wrote that he was thinking of selling the property. Then he came home, built the wall along the edge of the cliff above the stream, took the bleaching ground into the garden, and set off again. Guri could not understand why he, who had formerly watched her with Argus eyes, now allowed her so much liberty. Nothing more was said of a marriage with her and she was both glad and grateful. But she did not hear a word from Guttorm, and the longer she waited the more anxious she became. Some accident must have happened.

She suffered silently, fading under her grief. There was no one in whom she could confide, certainly not Halvard Sämundeeson, whom she feared. At last she formed a bold resolve—to go to America and seek Guttorm. But she only reached Christiania, no one would take her without money. Weeping and desolate, she sat disheartened on the wharf, and there Halvard found her. She trembled at the sight of him, but he did not scold nor fly into a rage

as usual—on the contrary, he was gentle and kind. If during the next year a letter should come from Guttorm, he promised to give her money for the journey; but now she must come home with him, he would treat her like a child, a daughter. It would be desolate at Fosnas without her, and Guttorm would surely write.

Guri marvelled at his generosity, but she was to be still more surprised on her return to Fosnas, for Halvard kept his word. She was really treated like a daughter of the house. All the coarser work was done for her, nothing was too good for her use, and when goods were sent from Christiania, she always had a special box which contained clothing, ornaments, and jewels richer and more costly than any girl in the neighborhood possessed. Guri wore the garments and thought she looked better than ever before, but she thought only of Guttorm—it was for him alone that she wished to be beautiful.

Then a rumor spread through the community that she was Halvard's mistress. At first this was only whispered, but gradually it became openly discussed, even at church meetings, till at last one day the pastor came to her—it was the very day after the parish meeting in which Halvard had carried through his plan for the new parsonage.

Guri scornfully denied the slander; but when the pastor had gone away she wept and grieved bitterly.

In the evening Halvard gently yet firmly represented that matters could not remain in their present condition. She was alone in the world, and therefore must be doubly careful of the opinions of others. If she should leave Fosnas now, people would naturally say that the story was true, and where could she go then—who would receive her? If she desired to stay he must, for the sake of his good name, beseech her to betroth herself to him. Too much had already been said, he could not submit to it. He loved her and owed her this vindication. If Guttorm still stood between them, he would defer the marriage a year. Should Guttorm write within that time, he would take a solemn oath to let her go, this was the finishing stroke. Guri wept, but accepted the betrothal ring he placed on her finger.

There are weddings whose bells seem to toll funeral notes, and whose hymns sound like dirges—Guri's was one of them. The kind pastor who had been so grieved by the rumor that she was Halvard's mistress, had no scruples about marrying her to him, nay he had even promised his friend and patron to avail himself of the opportunity to appeal to her conscience. But his address sounded as though Guri was about to enter Halvard's service rather than to fill the place of his wife. He laid great stress upon her solitary position in the world,

her slender merits compared to Halvard's who had so greatly benefitted the parish, the church, and the servant of the Lord, and said that she ought to thank God on her knees for the great blessings that had fallen to her lot. Guri stood motionless as if she did not hear his words, her eyes were fixed on vacancy, as though beholding another world, only when the pastor emphasized the words that the wife must be subject to her husband in *all things* she made a movement of retreat, but at the same instant he seized her hand, asking: "Do you consent to marry this man?"

Guri's lips moved, but no answer came. Her face grew even whiter than before.

"You must answer!" whispered the pastor.

Guri turned and looked at Halvard, whose red, bloated, self-satisfied face betrayed no trace of emotion, then she whispered; "Merciful Heaven, no!"

The pastor started and paused a moment, then glanced at Halvard, who cast a meaning look at him in reply.

"Then join hands," the clergyman went on without any sign of embarrassment. "And I pronounce you man and wife."

At the same instant Guri tottered and the heavy bridal crown fell from her head and rolled rattling over the stone floor of the church. But this was

the sole mishap that occurred; in every other respect the wedding passed off smoothly.

Yet it was no happy marriage, spite of the pastor's blessing. Scarcely three days had passed ere Halvard showed himself in his true character—suspicious, tyrannical, and cruel. No matter how humble and respectful Guri might be, he felt that the main thing was lacking, and the slightest cause sufficed to urge him from reproaches to violence, and from violence to actual frenzy. Then she was upbraided for everything; her humble origin, her poverty, her coldness—but he never alluded to her love for Guttorm, and though this was a mystery to Guri she felt heartily grateful. With all his brutality, this evinced a delicacy of feeling for which she longed to thank him.

The following year Guri was about to become a mother, and Halvard went to Christiania to make purchases for the christening feast. But he might have spared himself the trouble, the child lived only a few moments. "Such a puny little creature," said the nurse.

Halvard turned pale when he beheld the unnaturally old, wrinkled features of the little corpse and locking up the christening ornaments, uttered no word, not even to Guri. The latter was slow in regaining her health; she looked pale and miserable, and grieved secretly. The following year the

same thing occurred, and the physician summoned from the nearest city said that he had never beheld such a wizened, fragile infant. The third year another child was born and died, and this time Halvard was almost crazed with horror. All three children had been born on the same day, the anniversary of the day on which, years before, he had hurled Guttorm into the river. He saw it all plainly—the Lord's hand lay heavily upon him.

Guri seemed about to succumb to the loss of the last child. The physician had given up all hope of her recovery, and Halvard felt a sort of consolation in the thought that this was to be his punishment; then Heaven would be appeased. But the result differed from his expectations. Slowly, very slowly, she once more regained her strength, like a trampled flower whose roots still retain some lingering vitality.

Halvard at first watched her convalescence with cold indifference, then with anxiety, and at last with indignation. He had secretly hoped to appease God by her death and then to marry the widow of a rich lumber dealer in Drammen—and now!

His house became a prison, dreary, empty, and joyless. He began to hate the pale, quiet shadow, who obeyed him in everything and flitted through the large vacant rooms as noiselessly as a ghost. She could not help it, she did not even suspect it,

yet nevertheless she was his evil genius, she reminded him of Guttorm, of his crime, of the river.

There were moments when he longed to kill her, but he had not the courage. He felt as if all strength had deserted him and he was under a ban. He needed forgetfulness, so he returned to his old habits. From the day of his betrothal to Guri he had not touched a drop of gin; he had instinctively felt this to be necessary, if he desired to win her love. He had at times felt a desire for it, but now that the shadows closed so darkly around the temptation became too great—he was no longer capable of resisting it. Guri wept and entreated him to abstain for her sake. His answer was a torrent of abuse and constant association with all the dissolute people in the neighborhood. In other respects he pursued exactly the same course as before; he drank with locked doors and usually on Saturday evenings. Sunday morning he went to church compelling Guri to accompany him in her handsomest clothes. In the evening he played cards with the pastor, and returned home sober and full of pious talk.

Guri made no comment upon these things. She felt that the tie between them was sundered and secretly rejoiced, for his caresses had always been repulsive to her.

When his longing for drink assailed him, she

locked herself in her room and opened the door to no one. One evening he came raving through the shop and demanded admittance. In her terror she crept behind the bed and concealed herself among the curtains. He raged outside like a wild beast, using words so horrible that she shivered with fright. Suddenly he flung himself against the door so violently that the walls shook and the lock yielding, he fell headlong on the floor. In an agony of fear Guri darted past him out of the house, down the steps, into the garden, where the wall stopped her or she would have plunged over the precipice. She stood still a moment as though rooted to the earth. His voice, raised in furious wrath, echoed behind her and she knew no way of escape save the stairs leading along the edge of the river to the miller's house, which she dared not take, the steps were so old and decayed, and one slip would hurl her to a terrible death.

Halvard rushed out of the door like a madman, but when he saw her in the moonlight bending over the wall, he uttered a hoarse cry, clenched his fists, and retreated inside the dwelling. Soon after she heard the heavy bolts pushed across the door leading from the garden into the courtyard, and realized that she would be obliged to spend the cold autumn night shut out from her home. Never before had he carried his cruelty to such extremes.

Weeping bitterly, she sat down on the edge of the wall, determined to wait until he took pity on her! Above her head the moon sailed through the cloudless sky, below her dashed the torrent, seething, thundering, and sending a shower of white foam upwards. Suddenly a thought darted through her brain, drops of cold perspiration covered her forehead, and hurrying away from the wall she sought shelter under the cliff. The house stood steeped in the clear, cold moonlight; some of its windows were still lighted; but gradually these, too, grew dark. Soon after there was a movement near the door, then Guri heard a cry, followed by a fierce oath—it was Halvard driving one of the maid-servants back into the house, with the threat that he would kill any one who dared to set foot across the threshold. Silence, deathlike silence followed. The night was damp and icy cold. Guri trembled with fear, cold, and anxiety for what might come. At last she could bear this state of things no longer and, shivering violently, approached the stone wall—this was her only means of escape, a dangerous one, but her deadly terror forced her to risk it. The decaying wooden staircase, whose steps led down to the mill, overhung the river. Once it had been perfectly safe, a railing had afforded greater security and the steps were so strong that the farm-hands could carry heavy sacks of grain up and down.

But, since the new path had been made, the stairs had not been used for years and it was considered extremely dangerous to step on them.

Yet she seemed to have no other choice. She feared neither the night, the solitude, nor the strange unfamiliar voices of nature that reached her ear, sometimes from the forest, sometimes from the river. No, it was the thought which had suddenly entered her mind as she gazed into the rushing torrent, the thought that returned again and again, growing more and more distinct, a fancy that the stream was calling her, luring her into its depths as if there alone could she find rest, forgetfulness of all she had suffered.

Closing her eyes, Guri let herself slip down the side of the wall. Her feet found support on the damp, narrow wooden steps, but when she tried to cling to them, the upper one came off in her hand and the others were not much better. Nevertheless, she went down farther and farther, heard the roar of the water grow louder at every step, felt the spray wet her clothing, and the mouldering wood yield more and more under her weight. Now and then a step would be missing, others were so loose that they fell at the lightest touch. She closed her eyes, let herself slide down haphazard, and fell against some hard object.

When she rose she found herself at the foot of the

mill whose wheel was turned by the stream, and looked up at the way by which she had come. For a distance of more than three ells all the steps were missing, yet she had escaped alive! It was a miracle.

From the mill a path led along the precipice to the house where Vandfald-Johann lived. He and the stream had always been inseparable friends, for the little house he now occupied was his birthplace; his father had owned the mill before him. Nay, he was indebted to the river for his name. One day, when a very little boy, while carrying some dinner to his father, who was dragging timber across the ice, he fell through a crack behind the cataract. The shining buttons on his jacket could be distinctly seen glittering through the water which poured in a wide curve over him. There he stood for two hours until people succeeded in throwing him a long rope weighted with lead. When safely on shore again, he received his nickname—every child in the parish knew Vandfald-Johann; his real one was known only to himself. Afterwards he inherited the house and mill, which he would not sell, though rich Halvard Samundsen had offered large sums for the property. Vandfald-Johann remained faithful to his home and the tradition. Even when the master of Fosnas built the wall and thus cut off the direct path to the mill, its owner would not yield.

Quietly leaving the stairs to decay, he had built a wooden bridge across the water, over which, by taking a short circuit, customers could reach him as easily as before. He suffered little loss by Halvard's trick, for the peasants, perceiving its injustice, preferred to take their grain to him rather than to have it ground by Halvard's new mill-stones, even if they were run by steam. The owner of Fosnas knew that he was in the wrong, and, therefore, hated the miller so much the more. Nevertheless, he always shunned him; no one knew why, however, and if anybody warned Johann to beware of Halvard he merely shrugged his shoulders, just as though *he* were the wealthy master of Fosnas and Halvard the poor miller.

Light shone cheerily from the little house, which almost overhung the water. Guri knocked at the door and, as no one answered, opened it. The small entry was empty and so was the kitchen, where a large gray cat lay near the fire. Guri softly entered the third room used as sitting-room and bed-chamber. The light she had seen was burning in the middle of a table in the center, with an old Bible open beside it. A large bedstead stood by one wall, and on the opposite side a huge old-fashioned wooden chest. Wall-flowers were blooming on the windowsill and the smell of fresh meal filled the room. Outside, the river roared and seethed, sprinkling its white

foam over the window-panes. Within, an atmosphere of rest, peace, and kindness greeted her. The cat rubbed, mewling, against her, put its fore-paws in her lap, and began to purr. Guri stroked the animal which, thus encouraged, jumped on the table and almost upset the light. Guri steadied it, trimmed the wick, and then perceived above the door an inscription which had been carved by Johann with the utmost care. It ran as follows :

“ Each time that thou this door dost ope,
Bethink thee well of our sure hope,
Amid this sad world’s toil and strife,
Our Brother, Christ, the door of life.”

It was certainly no very remarkable poetical production, yet the simple words, the only lines Vandfald-Johann had ever written, contained something which roused a feeling akin to devotion. Their almost childish artlessness dispelled the evil thoughts which had weighed so heavily upon her soul while sitting on the wall. She had believed that she had found a door of her own by which she could flee from the toils and struggles of this earthly life. Here another door opened, a door which, by fidelity and sacrifice, led to the true life. She clasped her hands, murmuring “ Yes, I will go through that door.”

Just at that moment the sand on the floor of the entry creaked, the cat leaped down from the table, and Vandfald-Johann, bearing a willow-basket on

his back, stood before Guri. Gazing at her in astonishment, he laid a fresh faggot on the blazing hearth, and asked :

“ Where did you come from so late, Guri?”

“ From Fosnas,” she replied.

“ Indeed? I did not meet you on the road.”

“ No, I came by the mill-stairs.”

“ The mill-stairs?” repeated Johann staring at her.

“ There’s no way by the mill-stairs now.”

“ Yes, I came down the wooden steps,” Guri answered.

“ You are not in the habit of telling lies, Guri,” replied Vandfald-Johann, to whom the path by the mill-stairs was a sore point. “ Do you suppose I have forgotten that Halvard blocked the way to my mill with his stone-wall?”

“ Yet I came down the steps.”

Vandfald-Johann looked at her incredulously, shook his head, loosed the rope of his basket, and threw a handful of twigs on the fire, where the flames blazed brightly and the kettle began to sing. Then hanging his basket carefully on the wall, he asked : “ Do you use that way often ?”

“ You can see for yourself,” replied Guri, leaning, utterly exhausted, against the table.

“ I must first stop the mill,” returned Johann, “ then I can speedily discover whether you are trying to make a fool of me.”

A moment after Guri heard the mill stop and Johann soon returned—his face was deadly pale as he came up to her.

“Were you in fear of your life, did any one force you to take that way?” he asked, grasping her hand. “The last six steps of the stairs are gone.”

“I slipped down part of the way,” replied Guri, lowering her eyes.

“And fell close by the river,” Johann added. “I saw the print of your shoe on the edge of the bank. Where would you have been now, if you had slipped those two paces farther?”

Guri shuddered.

“Child, why did you take that way?” asked Johann, laying his trembling hand on her shoulder. “Did you wish to tempt Providence?”

The question touched the sore spot which the thought that had entered her mind while sitting on the stone-wall had left in her heart--and the mild, gentle tone reminded Guri of her childhood and her mother. She had never spoken of her married life to any one. Misfortune makes us hard, and at the sound of Johann's steps outside, she had tried to find some plausible falsehood to cloak her strange nocturnal pilgrimage. She had firmly resolved not to permit even Vandfald-Johann, whom she had known so many years, to have a glimpse of her soul. He should be the last to know how she suffered—but

now, just after her escape from mortal peril, when his gentle voice and trembling hand revealed his deep sympathy, the crust of ice in which she had encased her heart melted, and tears streamed from her eyes.

“He drove me out of the house,” she sobbed.

“Who?”

“Halvard, my husband,” she whispered. “He tortures me like a brute, and my life is not safe under his roof.”

A shadow flitted over the old man’s face, and he suddenly looked paler, older than before.

“Do you mean that he would be capable of killing you?” he asked slowly, and she felt his hands tremble. “Yet, why not! But you, too—you too! No, that would be too much.”

“What do you mean? Do you know anything?” cried Guri, growing pale as a corpse.

“If I did, I should take care not to tell it,” replied Johann, hurriedly closing the Bible. “I can say only this, he would doubtless far rather kill me than you.”

“What do you know?” asked Guri again, looking earnestly into his eyes.

Johann avoided her gaze, and answered slowly:

“People cannot know everything, and are only permitted to repeat the smallest portion of what knowledge they do possess. Our tongues may be

bound by an oath, but of this I am sure—if I can once get speech with Halvard Samundsen, you will be left in peace from that hour. Shall I see him?”

Guri gazed at him in astonishment, then nodded assent.

“Can I help you in any other way?” asked Vandfald-Johann, moving towards the kitchen, where the water was boiling in the tea-kettle.

“I thank you,” replied Guri, “but I need nothing but rest!”

“Then I’ll bid you good-night, if you can sleep on my hard bed. Early to-morrow morning I will go with you to Fosnas.”

He shut the door and began to prepare his supper. Guri, wishing to calm herself by reading, took up the Bible. As she laid it on the table the old volume opened, and her eye rested on a line, deeply underscored.

“Thou shalt not kill.”

Johann had painted a red cross on the margin of the page and written something in ink under it, but the words were already so faded that she could not decipher them. “Johann! Johann!” she whispered, tapping at the door.

Johann opened it and, seeing the Bible in her hand, said:

“I thank you for bringing me the book which has been my companion on many a wakeful night. But

you must go to sleep now. You need have no fear, I will lock you in."

He took the Bible as he spoke and locked the door. Guri slowly undressed, but she could not sleep. The torrent roared so loudly, scattering its spray aloft, and the silvery moonbeams were reflected in the white drops. In a condition midway between sleep and waking she watched the white waves, but a blood-red cross floated high on their crests, and a voice from the depths seemed to be constantly repeating: "Thou shalt not kill."

What did Vandfald-Johann know? This was her last thought before she fell asleep, and the first when she awoke. Johann's honest, weatherbeaten old face, which she had known so many years, appeared before her, and his voice said:

"It's seven o'clock, we must set out for Fosnas."

At this moment it seemed to Guri as if all her nocturnal thoughts had been mere idle dreams.

"Thank you, but it will be best for me to go alone."

Nevertheless the old man went with her as far as the courtyard. Everything about the house was silent and deserted. The people had all started at sunrise to search for Guri.

Halvard was sleeping off his potations behind locked doors and Guri, who knew how he behaved if disturbed, entreated Johann to go back. Soon

afterwards some of the servants returned and the old man departed, nodding significantly to Guri, as he said: "He still has the ham in pickle with me, I'll be ready for him this afternoon. Then you shall see that I can preach as well as the pastor."

Guri pretended not to understand him, but she felt sure that something was buried under the red cross. What that something might be she dared not guess, with all her strength she repressed the thought.

* * * * *

Towards evening, to her great alarm, Johann really did return and she was obliged to let him go in to Halvard's room, the latter having announced his waking by pacing to and fro and hoarsely clearing his throat. Guri stood trembling at the door, scarcely daring to breathe, fearing every second to see Johann come flying out of the window or rolling down the steps. She would as willingly have shut him up with a raging bear just roused from slumber.

To her surprise, however, Halvard did not seem disposed to use either of these means of getting rid of his visitor. When Johann entered he at first muttered like an angry bull, but this muttering soon ceased and the conversation was carried on in tones so low that, no matter how intently she listened, she could hear nothing. True, several times

Halvard growled something but, as soon as Johann said a few words in answer, the growling ceased, and Guri almost fancied she heard a suppressed sob.

Shortly after, Halvard tottered out and humbly asked Guri to get supper; Vandfald-Johann would spend the evening with him. As she stood gazing timidly at him he came up to her, entreated her forgiveness, and finally attempted to kiss her. But she shrank away with a horror never experienced before. His eyes were bloodshot, and it seemed as though she were meeting the angry glare of some half-tamed wild beast.

Johann remained all the evening, and when he went away Halvard accompanied him across the courtyard, and said that perhaps it would be best for all concerned to have the old road to the mill opened again. Guri did not know what to think. She dreaded being alone with him and trembled from head to foot when she heard his heavy tread approaching; but he vanished into the room where he had been talking with Johann, and she heard him locking and unlocking trunks and boxes, muttering softly to himself. Soon after, he entered Guri's room, dragging a quantity of heavy silk skirts, jackets, and caps, enough to stock a fair. She should have them all, with clasps, buckles, and

silver chains a finger thick. But all must be forgiven and forgotten; he would be a different man.

And he was a different man in so far that, from that day, he permitted Guri to have her own way in everything and never attacked her. Of course, it was impossible to restore their former relations—the gulf was too wide and Guri's aversion was too strong for that—but she could live as she pleased on condition that she permitted him to do the same. Without any open breach, they tacitly agreed to occupy separate wings of the house, where each received his or her friends and acquaintances. Guri chose the rooms looking out upon the garden and the river; Halvard's faced the forest. Guri had the sunlight and the view of the stream winding like a foaming silver ribbon through the narrow valley. Halvard's apartments, on the contrary, were dark, gloomy, and pervaded by a cellar-like atmosphere which, however, seemed by no means disagreeable to him. Guri was visited by the old women of the parish, Vandfald-Johann, and the poor. Halvard by the pastor and some boon companions. Shouts and screams, singing and quarreling were often heard in his wing until late at night, except on Saturdays and Sundays; on those days it was always quiet. On Saturdays he always played cards with the pastor and the sexton, and on Sundays he went to church and in the evenings continued his game with the pastor.

Now he usually got drunk on Wednesdays—for Halvard was a business-man, and liked order and method in everything. Guri grieved secretly, not for Halvard, but for the disgrace he brought upon the whole farm. The more careless and negligent he became, the more industriously she attended to the business, but in a quiet unobtrusive way, never crossing him. Many helped her, unsuspected by Halvard, and she worked the harder the more plainly she saw that he had wrongfully appropriated the property of others.

During the long winter evenings, while she sat alone in her room, toiling over the complicated account books, she could not help feeling a certain anxiety which, amid the profound stillness surrounding her, finally increased to actual terror. Since the night at the mill she had often talked to Vandfald-Johann and entreated him to tell her the meaning of the red cross, but the old man, usually so loquacious, was silent as the grave on this point.

Guri, who, when a child, had heard of the Englishman's disappearance, thought that Johann probably knew more about the matter than most people. Yet she did not venture to question him directly; she felt a vague fear of having her suspicion confirmed. The idea that the cross might have some reference to Guttorm never entered her brain. He must have found an early death somewhere in that distant land

where the sun of her happiness had set, or he would surely have sent for her long ago.

So the years rolled on, equally uneventful, equally sad! Spring had come again, the snow was melting, the river was swollen, and the birches were putting out shining young leaves. Halvard's logs danced down the stream like floating matches. He had been to Drammen, where he had driven a good bargain, and came back from the city with some lumber-dealers on Wednesday evening. Guri saw a light in the large room behind the shop, so she knew that he had returned and what would inevitably follow. At midnight she heard singing and laughter, a wild medley of men's and women's voices; but she was so accustomed to it that she only bolted her door more securely before she went to rest.

To-night, however, the uproar seemed worse than usual. She could not sleep, for all the windows in the opposite wing stood open and the ravings of the drunken crew were doubly repulsive in the clear Spring night. But soon after twelve o'clock everything became quiet. She heard the strangers' carriages roll away, though Halvard swore and entreated them to stay until morning. Then she heard him staggering about his room the doors were banged noisily, and the windows shut. Next came the heavy fall so familiar to Guri's ears.

She rose and drew back the curtain to see that he

did no mischief with the lamp. No—everything was dark save for the faint glimmer of the approaching dawn on the opposite windows. The sparrows were already beginning to twitter in the courtyard, a thrush was singing softly from the clump of dark fir-trees in the garden and the roar of the torrent rose from the valley, now louder, now fainter, just as the wind bore the sound to her ears. Guri went to bed, repeated her evening prayer, and soon fell into a deep slumber.

The next day passed as usual. Halvard asked for neither breakfast nor dinner, but this was his custom, he rarely ate anything on Thursdays. Towards the afternoon she went over to his wing to get money for a poor woman who had sought her aid, and thought it strange that she heard no movement in the back-room. The servants, too, had neither heard nor seen Halvard, and as the door was still locked, Guri supposed that he had not yet slept off his intoxication. Towards evening she again went to his room and put her ear against the door, but the stillness was so death-like that she distinctly heard the throbbing of her own heart. Holding her breath, she listening intently. No, there was no sound save the ticking of the clock and the drip of the brandy from the casks.

It was the silence of death! With a cry she rushed into the shop, calling for help.

But the door of Halvard's sanctuary was no ordinary one, and he had bolted it the night before with special care. Guri, pale as death, stood holding a light for the servant who was forcing it open with an axe, while two more strong men pressed their whole weight against it. At last, with a loud crash, the door yielded and the men were in the room, but they rushed out as quickly as they had entered. By the dim light Guri saw Halvard lying on his back, with his limbs doubled under him; one hand grasped the key of his money-chest, the other was pressed convulsively upon his heart. His eyes and mouth were wide open and, but for their fixed expression, one might have supposed him to be asleep, for his features were not distorted and the red flush still remained on his face.

The doctor was instantly summoned, but he had been sent for to some place among the mountains and no one knew when he would return. When he reached Fosnas—about midnight—he found Guri cold and tearless, in a strange state of feverish excitement. She would not look upon her husband again, declaring that he looked like some slaughtered animal. It required long persuasion from the physician to induce her to enter the dark room. The corpse lay in precisely the same position. Guri had forbidden every one to touch it, and she had not the courage to do so herself; she had the dread we feel

towards a dead wasp, which we fancy may yet sting.

The doctor examined the body, shook his head, examined it again—it might be heart-disease, but the case was very strange. Death had apparantly occurred, but nevertheless many signs existed which made it doubtful. Guri must watch the corpse; he would come the next morning and write the certificate of death.

With these words he took his departure.

Guri stood as if petrified; she felt as though she were dreaming. She was like a prisoner suddenly released from the fetters which for years have cut into his flesh. She had felt no pleasure in Halvard's death, only a sense of freedom. And now? Could it be possible? Was he really still alive? Might he recover to forge new chains, to lead her back to the dark, cheerless dungeon in which she had languished for so many years? She trembled at the bare thought, yet there was something from which she shrank still more—the watch with the corpse. A long, anxious night entirely alone with the lifeless body of the man whom she had never been able to love, and who—a secret voice told her—had left this world with a heavy sin on his conscience! The red cross in Johann's Bible seemed to her excited imagination to be hovering on the wall above Halvard's bed—no, it was only the shadow of the key of the

strong box. But to be alone with him—with a murderer—and suppose he should return to life?

Yet she must do it—she could not acknowledge her fear to the servants.

So she sat in the gloomy back-room through the long Spring night; the light flared unsteadily at every gust of wind that blew against the panes. She was full of anxiety and horror, and prayed fervently that God would be merciful to Halvard's soul! A storm was raging outside and the rain beat against the windows. Suddenly she started up, gazed in terror at the bed, and held her breath to listen. No, the sigh she fancied she had heard could not have come from his lips. Halvard still lay silent and motionless; but why did he not look pale like other dead people? She sank back into her chair, and the wick of the candle grew like some fiery, poisonous fungus, but she dared not rise to trim it, what should she do in the dark room if it went out?

Again the rain beat against the panes and the tempest howled; a gust of wind swept through the room, the wick of the candle scattered sparks of fire. Guri started; was she trembling, or did the floor shake under her feet? She rose. Again she heard a sigh, this time an unmistakable sigh from the bed, followed by a gurgling sound. Guri stood rigid with terror, then her trembling hand grasped the candle. It must be done, she was his wife.

Tottering like a somnambulist she went to the bed, raised the candle, and gazed at him in terror. Halvard lay just as before, rigid and motionless, only she saw in the left corner of his mouth some blood-tinged foam. She stooped to wipe it away, and while her face was close to his another sigh escaped his chest and his eyes opened. With a piercing shriek Guri dropped the candle and fell fainting on the floor. When she recovered her senses, the first ray of sunshine was breaking through the clouds and by its light she saw a pool of blood beside the bed—her own clothes were stained with it.

In the morning Halvard's relatives came, and with them the doctor. Guri told him of the horrible incident which had occurred during the night, but he took the matter very quietly, saying that such things were not unusual with very full-blooded people who died suddenly. After examining the body again, he wrote the certificate of death and said that they might now proceed with the arrangements for the funeral. Guri did not know the customs of that part of the country, but Halvard's relations relieved her of all care.

They were all rich peasants and thought Halvard Samundsen had lowered himself by marrying a poor girl like Guri. They had not concealed this opinion during his life-time and, now that he was dead, it seemed to afford them special

satisfaction to make Guri feel their contempt. Though she was now owner of the house and sole heiress of Halvard's property, the brothers behaved as though they had the whole direction of affairs. They meant to see that their brother had a fitting funeral, yes, that they would. They had attended funerals enough ; they knew that there must be no lack of liquor ; they would see to it that their brother's burial was talked about as far as Christiania !

Guri felt offended, humbled, scorned, but she kept silence and permitted them to do their will. Heaven be praised, they could not recall him to life. There was but one point in the elaborate details of the burial on which she could not agree with the brothers. She knew far better than any one else the strange aversion the dead man had always cherished for the part of the house facing the river, and therefore she wished to have the funeral procession start from the rooms Halvard had occupied. But the brothers would not hear of it. A man like Halvard not be permitted to lie in his coffin in his own best room, the funeral procession not take the direct way to the church ! Doubtless they ought to steal out of some back-door in order not to disturb the Lady of Fosnas ! No, they would show the neighborhood what sort of man Halvard Samundsen had been, and the pastor should deliver an address as

long as the room, and they would provide plenty of white sand and gay flowers—there were enough, and to spare, of the latter in the garden.

Guri silently locked herself into her chamber, leaving the brothers to have their own way and to attend to everything.

The day of the funeral came, a bright Spring-day, with green trees, singing birds, rippling streams, and fragrant flowers—it seemed as if earth knew nothing of death and change, and down the valley, at the foot of the precipice, the river dashed foaming and surging, for this Spring its waters were deeper and fuller than they had ever been within the memory of man. At the corner, where the tall birch-trees stood, the stream made a curve, the spray dashed against the high cliff, rushed over the huge boulders which it had polished round and smooth in the course of the centuries, and then, with a bold leap, suddenly plunged over the cliff, whirling, foaming, seething, falling from ledge to ledge with a thunderous roar, to vanish among the rocks below, whence it flowed swiftly on again, moistening the edge of the garden with its spray, which glittered and sparkled in the sunlight like a myriad rainbows.

In this garden had gathered the members of the parish who, though not expressly invited to the funeral, had desired to attend it. They stood in little groups, whispering together, the men apart

from the women, discussing the probable amount of Halvard Samundsen's wealth, and whether his brothers, the rich lumber-dealers from Drammen, would inherit it, or if he had left it all to Guri, who, in the latter case would, of course, marry again, they all agreed upon that.

It was unanimously admitted that Halvard Samundsen of Fosnas would take barrels full of gold with him into the grave, and this opinion was strengthened by those who came from the churchyard, where they had been looking at the place of interment; for Halvard was not to be buried like ordinary men, but placed in a vault. Such a thing had never been seen in the parish, not even when the rich farmer Johann died—a man at least as wealthy as Halvard. The old women said that little good could come of it; for whoever shunned lying in Christian soil, like other men, must not wonder if the last trumpet did not rouse him on the day of judgment.

But this opinion was only whispered in corners, chiefly by those who had not liked the rich man during his life. Most people admired the splendid and substantial fashion in which the burial-place had been built. Even Christiania could hardly boast so strong an iron railing and colossal a monument as were to adorn Halvard's grave. They forgot one thing, however—that Halvard himself had

ordered these things, and even given the most minute directions in his will for the purchase of everything that could lend magnificence and pomp to his funeral.

In the best-room, which was completely hung with black, the folding-doors leading into the garden were flung wide open, so that the crowd outside could look into this innermost sanctuary, where the invited guests had assembled. The coffin, surrounded by wax-candles, whose red flames flickered in the draught, stood on trestles facing the garden. The sunbeams streamed through the open doors and stole through a chink in the window, falling in flickering spots on the lower part of the coffin-lid. The floor was covered with pine boughs and the room was crowded with dark figures with weather-beaten faces and horny hands—workmen and woodcutters, who had been invited in order to carry the corpse the long distance to the churchyard.

Behind these clumsy figures, clad in rough frieze blouses, which smelt musty, Halvard's friends and relations sat on long, black-draped benches. They were rich farmers, lumber-dealers, and owners of saw-mills, and were placed exactly according to the size and weight of their money-bags. The conversation was carried on in short, whispered sentences, a heavy, oppressive atmosphere brooded over the whole assembly—a peculiar blending of the odor of

flowers, pine-boughs, and mould—and all gazed out into the sunshine gilding the laughing valley with its changeful radiance, and secretly wished that the pastor would come.

But the pastor did not arrive! Minute after minute passed, a quarter of an hour, half an hour elapsed—still no pastor! The air in the large crowded room grew heavier and more oppressive, the scent of the pine boughs sharper and more pungent, the whispered talk carried on in corners louder and more anxious—but the pastor did not come. The golden sunbeams that had flickered on the foot of the coffin moved higher and rested on the fragrant garland Guri had woven, then they reached a wide opening in the hangings and suddenly merged into a warm, rosy flood of sunshine, a stream of light in which the dust-motes danced like drops of blood.

“Where the deuce is the pastor?” one of the brothers exclaimed. “Surely he hasn’t fallen into the river!”

The carelessly uttered suggestion sent a slight shiver through the assembled mourners—the older people in the parish had not yet forgotten the Englishman, others had heard rumors of the story, and a death-like silence instantly followed—an oppressive pause in both words and thoughts, which rested like a nightmare on the company. The

brothers felt it, and the oldest one said in an awkward, boastful fashion :

“I must beg our honored guests’ pardon. We are expecting a Councilor of State from Christiania. Possibly he has stopped at the pastor’s to take a little rest after the long journey.”

The words seemed to disperse at a blow all the dark shadows hovering in the air. A Councilor of State! Heavens and earth! Surely they could afford to wait a little while for such a personage. All knew that Halvard Samundsen of Fosnas had been a rich man, whose logs were floated down to Christiania for all the public buildings; but that a Councilor of State, a real live Councilor of State, should come up the river as far as Fosnas was a thing nobody had ever imagined. The news spread like wild-fire from the men in the dark room to the throng in the garden, and all strove to get a glimpse of the Councilor of State—the pastor was forgotten, and even Halvard Samundsen was left to oblivion. All eyes gazed down the sun-lit valley where the iron suspension bridge looked like a black line against the foaming river and the road wound up the hill in zigzag curves like a pale grey serpent.

Suddenly a buzz of admiration ran through the garden, widening in larger and larger circles till, to the amazement of the brothers, it entered the room where the coffin stood.

“The Councilor of State is coming!” ran the murmur. “He’s down in the valley,” and in truth three figures appeared, sharply relieved against the light-blue sky, just at the point where the road made a bend near the suspension bridge.

The first was the pastor, they could recognize him by his canonicals, the second was a broad-shouldered man dressed in black, at least a head taller than the clergyman—it must be the Councilor of State. Then came a small, bent figure in peasant costume—the far-sighted thought he resembled Vandfald-Johann, but why in the world should the old man come to Halvard Samundsen’s burial? The group crossed the bridge, vanished in the green birch wood, emerged into the sunlit road, and then vanished again; but the nearer they came the more evident it was to the watchers that there had been no mistake. Two of the men were certainly the pastor and Vandfald-Johann; but who was the giant walking between them, dressed in a fine cloth coat and high hat, and wearing a full beard? Was that the attire of a Councilor of State?

The attention of those in the room had also been attracted by the approaching figures, and the guests nearest to the door jostled and pushed one another to get a better view. In the confusion one of the black hangings was torn from the window, and the sun, which had hitherto stolen in like a thief, now

poured a full crimson stream of light upon the coffin, so that the brothers were obliged to shade their eyes—the change was too sudden.

Some of the women attempted to force a passage through the throng in order to fasten the hanging up again, but, meanwhile, some of the candles at the head of the bier were upset, the pine boughs began to catch fire and, amid the general confusion, the women were crowded back again. At the same instant the doorway was darkened, the three new arrivals entered one after another, the pastor first, then the giant, and finally Vandfald-Johann, who slipped shyly into a corner. The pastor seemed greatly excited—but that might have been due to the exertion of the walk. When he reached the foot of the coffin, he turned toward the Councilor of State and was heard to whisper: “I cannot, it is impossible. You ask too much.”

“I ask only the truth,” replied the giant, setting his foot on the highest step of the platform.

“Why disturb the peace of the grave? There is no proof, I tell you.”

“Go on, pastor, and perform the duties of your office,” answered the giant, leaning against the wall with his arms folded across his chest.

All eyes were fixed upon the stalwart, athletic figure which, without any salutation to those present,

stood like a column with his keen gray eyes bent steadily upon the coffin-lid. Was *he* the Councilor of State? Impossible! What resemblance could there be between a Councillor of State, bowed by years and the dignity of his office, and this vigorous, broad-shouldered man, whose head, covered with waving locks of thick fair hair, towered above every one else? Yet, so far as dress and bearing were concerned, he was well suited for the position. There was something peculiar in his whole appearance—a foreign, distinguished air. His clothes were plain, but fitted him perfectly, and their cut revealed the workmanship of a foreign tailor. The black trousers and coat, buttoned to the throat, were made of fine cloth, and the tall, broad-brimmed black hat gave him somewhat the aspect of an English clergyman, a resemblance heightened by the stern, grave expression of his face. He wore no jewelry, and had not even put on gloves, but his hands were as white as the linen he wore. A bunch of violets, fastened in his button-hole, exhaled a strong fragrance and looked like an order of knighthood. The pastor approached the coffin, clasped his hands, and half shutting his eyes, for the sun was shining directly into his face, began :

“Give to each person what you owe. Money where you owe money, honor where you owe honor, and justice where justice is due.”

“Aye, Pastor, so be it,” said the giant, clasping his hands over his chest.

The pastor turned pale, and the schoolmaster, a little thin man with bristling hair, forced his way through the crowd, looked up at him and said in a sing-song tone: “I must beg you not to interrupt the sacred service by looks, words, or gestures, or I shall be compelled to show you to the door.”

The giant leaned back against the wall, which creaked under his weight, and looked down at the little man's shock head with a peculiar smile. Some one in the corner tittered, and the sexton instantly went there to silence the culprit.

“Yes,” the pastor went on, raising his voice, “we need no longer give money to the sleeper beside whose bier we stand, he wants it now as little as he did in life, when he always had an abundant store. What shall we bestow on him then, dear friends? The treasures of this world? Ah, no! He had them all in abundance to his life's end! We need give nothing of this sort, my hearers. We will only plant a beautiful tree on his grave, the tree of honor, for honor, honor—”

Here the speaker suddenly began to stammer. Did the sun trouble him, or had he forgotten the speech he had so carefully learned to do honor to the companion with whom he had played cards for so many years. He cleared his throat, drew out his

handkerchief, coughed, in short used all the arts a practised speaker always has at hand, but whenever he attempted to go on with: "Honor, my dear friends," an invisible hand seemed to clutch his throat and stifle his voice.

The stranger had changed neither attitude nor bearing since the luckless word had escaped the pastor's lips. He interrupted him neither by look, word, nor gesture as the schoolmaster phrased it. Only his eyes rested immovably on the speaker—a pair of calm, piercing, steel-gray eyes, which hurled a world of contempt and scorn into the preacher's face and compelled him to lower his glance. He stood half in shadow, half illumined by the red glow of sunlight, and the clear-cut profile, luxuriant beard, and waving hair sharply outlined against the sunbeams, seemed strangely familiar to the older people, who fancied they must have seen them before, yet could not tell where.

"Honor, my dear friends," the pastor began again.

"Read the Lord's Prayer, Pastor!" said the giant's voice, like a captain issuing his orders from the quarter-deck of his ship.

The pastor started and turned deadly pale. The schoolmaster elbowed his way through the throng, and, standing on tiptoe, cried in his shrill tones, "Might I beg you not to interrupt His Reverence? or I shall be compelled to eject you by force."

“Read the Lord’s Prayer, Pastor!” thundered the stranger again, this time with such emphasis that the little schoolmaster, with a start, fell backwards over the bench; the bishop himself could not have spoken more authoritatively.

A restless movement ran through the crowd, people put their heads together and whispered, but no one ventured any open opposition, the stranger’s words sounded as though he had a right to speak and was firmly resolved to use it. The schoolmaster cast a side-glance at the pastor; Halvard’s two brothers rose with crimson faces. The pastor motioned to the schoolmaster to keep silence, and whispered a few words to the brothers, upon which they resumed their seats. Then, going to the head of the coffin, he clasped his hands and said in tremulous tones: “Let us repeat the Lord’s Prayer over the sleeper.”

“Amen!” said the stranger, raising his hat. All followed his example, and the prayer was repeated amid silence so profound that the roar of the river seemed like an interruption.

When it was over, the clergyman appeared irresolute. He cleared his throat several times and looked significantly at the brothers, but they shook their heads and remained in their seats. At last, wiping the perspiration from his brow, he beckoned to the schoolmaster.

"Before we commit this body to consecrated ground," the latter began in a drawling tone, "we will ask whether any one present desires to see the dead man ere we screw down the lid and lay his earthly remains in the grave."

Death-like silence reigned. The roar of the torrent was again heard, now louder, now fainter, as the wind bore the sound to their ears. The sun had reached the edge of the woods and now touched a mass of clouds like a huge blood-red disk, whose rays, illumined the stranger's whole figure.

"Let me see Halvard Samundsen," he said, advancing to the coffin.

The schoolmaster hesitated, looking inquiringly at the pastor; but the latter, with a heavy sigh, nodded assent, and the lid fell slowly back. A faint shriek rose from the side of the room where the women sat—it was Guri, who fainted and was carried away. Even the stranger drew back a step with an expression of loathing on his calm features—and there was ample reason. Halvard lay in the full glow of the warm sunshine, clad in his white shroud, with his hands clasped on his breast.

His face was still red and bloated, the coarseness and sensuality that had marked the features in life were still impressed upon them. The eyes were half open and the large pupils peered from beneath the lids, they were not glazed, but reflected the sun-

beams. The mouth was slightly awry, the left-corner drawn down, giving the face a horrible expression of roguishness, as though death were only a bad joke. Even the clasped hands were still red and had fallen a little apart—Halvard Samundsen had rarely folded them in life.

The stranger glanced around the assembled throng—every one seemed paralyzed with horror. Then, advancing a step nearer to the coffin, he raised his hand over it and said in his deep, calm voice:

“All the lies that can be bought with gold and this world’s gear you will hear later at the churchyard, and I shall not follow you there. Here you shall hear only one word, but it is a word of truth, and this truth will pierce your hearts: ‘Here lies a murderer!’ Now go and bury him.”

The few words, which sounded like a thunderclap, had the effect of a thunderbolt. Those who stood nearest shrank suddenly away from the coffin, whose lid fell rattling on the floor, scattering the flowers in every direction. At the same moment a voice in the crowd exclaimed: “That is the truth.” The people near the door hurried out. The pastor alone did not lose his composure, but turned to the stranger and asked: “By what right do you make this assertion. Have you witnesses?”

“There stands my witness!” said the stranger,

pointing to Vandfald-Johann—it was he who had just spoken.

“But that is only *one*,” the pastor answered calmly. “And why did he not speak at the time?”

“Halvard threatened his life,” replied the other, “you know that as well as I do.”

“He is but *one*,” the pastor repeated, “and one person may be mistaken. Two witnesses at least are required, you have only *one*. You have no right to disturb the peace of the grave and bring shame upon the dead man.”

“Then let God be my witness!” cried the stranger, solemnly raising his hand. “You are right, pastor. I have only *one*. Very well, I shall go now, and you will never see me again. But I have yet a word to say to Halvard Samundsen—I would far rather have said it to him in life.”

The pastor waved him back, but he went to the foot of the coffin, laid his hand firmly on the dead man’s breast, and said, in a voice that thrilled every heart:

“Halvard Samundsen of Fosnas! Listen! you shall never find rest in your grave, because you basely murdered my young brother, Guttorm Solej.”

A piercing shriek rang from the next room. “Od!” cried a weak voice.

“Od! Od of Solej!” was whispered in every corner. Suddenly a strange creaking noise inter-

rupted the intense stillness. The wood in Halvard's coffin seemed alive. The clasped hands parted, and the left arm fell heavily over the edge of the coffin. The schoolmaster tried to replace it in the proper position, but uttered a yell of horror, for the hand of the corpse grasped his so firmly that he could scarcely release it. Halvard's hand fell again, groped about an instant, seized the edge of the coffin, and the still form slowly rose, the wide-open eyes fixed with a spectral glare upon the sun.

"God defend us, he is rising!" shrieked a wild uproar of voices, and in an instant every one took flight—it was a scene of unparalleled confusion. Doors were opened, curtains torn down, windows shattered, for they must escape, escape from this terror. The screams were echoed from the garden, where half the parish had gathered. Everybody was running and pushing, children cried, women screamed, no one wished to see the frightful spectacle, yet an awful curiosity held them to the spot. The crowd surged to and fro like a stormy sea, and listened to the screams of horror which still came from the house.

Suddenly the stillness of death fell upon the assembly, every one held his breath, no one ventured to stir, and the roar and thunder of the cataract was distinctly heard.

“ Oh, Lord, there he comes ! ” shrieked a woman’s voice, and all eyes turned toward the door.

And Halvard really did come, with arms outstretched and fingers spread wide apart, muttering unintelligible words, as had always been his habit. The groping hands caught the rail of the steps, down which he tottered like a somnambulist, dragging the large white shroud after him. The people, awe-struck, shrank away, forming a broad, sunlit path through which he walked down the garden, straight towards the setting sun, which he seemed grasping at with his right arm. The spectators, rigid with horror, stood watching him. Not a hand moved to stop the living spectre, whose crime they all knew. The last group parted—and he stood by the wall, just at the spot where an opening had been made to allow a passage to the mill. Here he paused an instant, with the cataract seething and hissing at his feet ; but he did not heed it. His gaze was fixed upon the sun, the setting sun, which now touched the edge of the forest.

“ Halvard Samundsen, take care ! ” shouted a loud voice from the throng. It was Od, who had just left Guri’s bedside. At the same instant the sun vanished behind the trees. Halvard made a movement forwards as if to grasp it and, with extended arms, disappeared. The folds of the white pall floated to and fro on the waves till it caught upon

a rock projecting from the precipice. No cry, no sound was heard—the thunder of the cataract drowned everything. But farther down, beyond the cliffs, the foam whirled in an eddy where floated red drops. Then they, too, vanished, and the river rushed on white and stainless as ever.

A week later there was another funeral at Fosnas—Guri was borne to her last repose. She had a long funeral procession, but no tears of fortunate heirs fell on her grave. Od stood silently by it for a long time, lovingly arranging the flowers death, not life, had bestowed.

He left the churchyard just at sunset, and pausing on the little suspension bridge, gazed down the valley. Fosnas was steeped in the radiant glow of sunlight, all its windows were flashing and sparkling, while Solej lay in the deepest shadow; the river, which above flowed like molten gold, here rolled in heavy, leaden waves. Casting one last glance at the foaming water, he murmured:

“You are avenged, Guttorm!”

A silver-haired old man on the other side of the valley waved a farewell with his cap. Od saw and answered the salute. It was Vandfald-Johann taking leave of “The last Solej.”

THE END.

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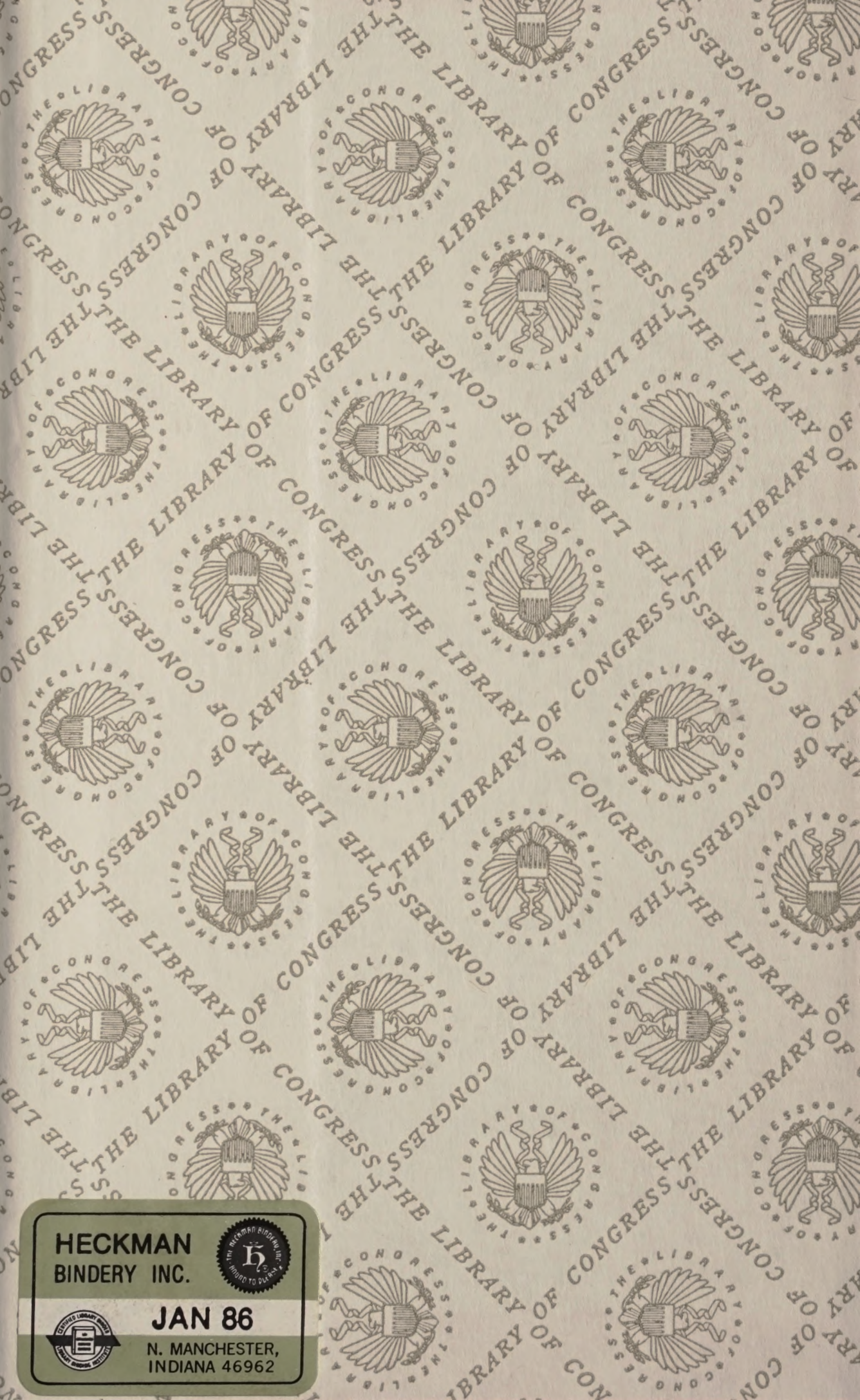




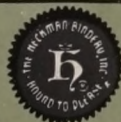








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